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Gnome

IT IS with deep regret and a feeling of intense personal sadness that I report the resignation of the Hon. Lachlustre Gnome from his position in the Gnome Organisation.

For the last ten years, my son Lachlustre has been Deputy Chief Management (News) Co-ordinator of Gnome International.

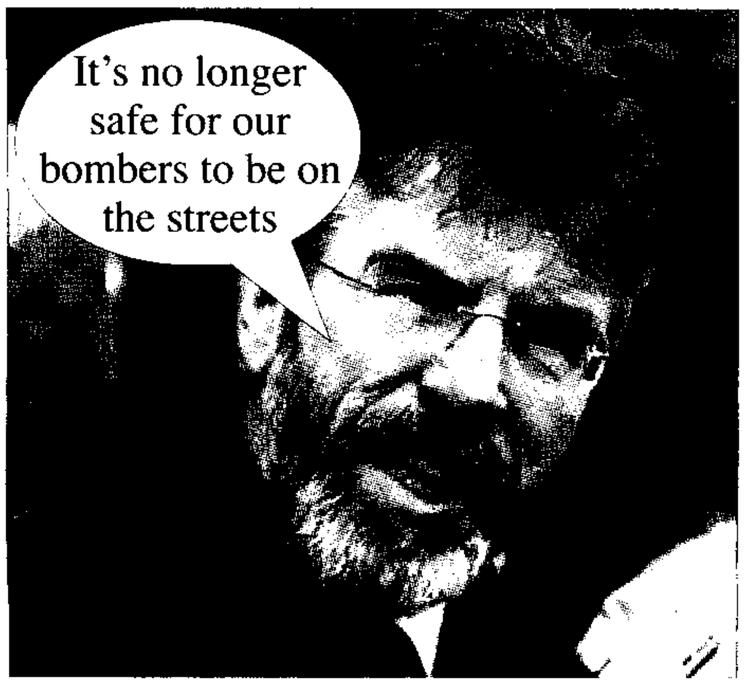
Let me stress at once that I have never doubted for a moment the business acumen of Lachlustre Gnome, who has undoubtedly ensured the success of our Organisation for many years to come.

However, no one is indispensable, and to suggest, as some have done, that my son's resignation bodes ill for the future, verges on the libellous.

The sad fact is that the boy showed little promise and, as my wife, Wen Dung Gnome, pointed out, there will be more money for me now that he's gone.

E. Strobes,
pp. Lord Gnome,
Manhattan Penthouse Suite,
94/94th Street,
NY, USA.

IRA END WAR



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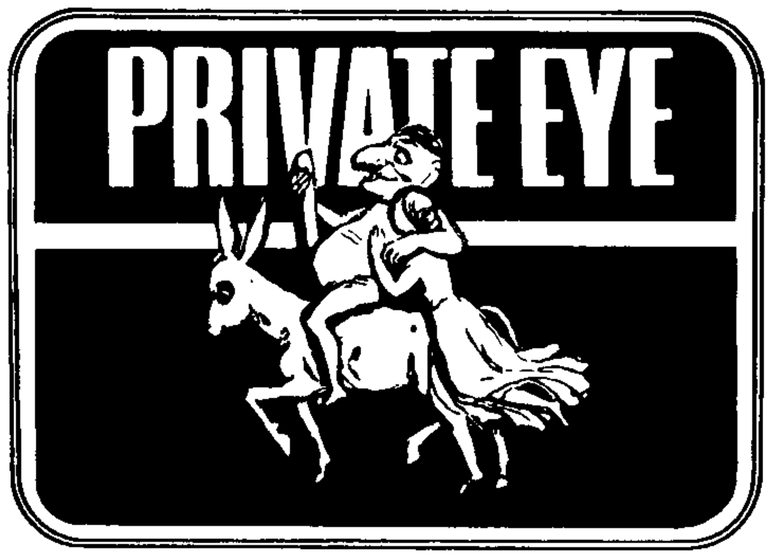


The hols truth!

■ **Hackwatch: When Polly met Glenda** 5
■ **Astounding Hislop lookalike** 14
■ **Sir Max Hastings's diary** 23
■ **PFI goes mental; Qinetiq gets rich; the great VAT rip-off; In The Back** 25-27
■ **Slicker on the Chang tragedy** 28, 29

IS Roy Clark, director of investigations at the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC), really the right person to oversee the inquiry into the shooting of Brazilian electrician Jean Charles de Menezes at Stockwell tube station?

Given the sensitivity of the case, perhaps not.

There was no small concern when "non-stick" Roy, former Met deputy assistant commissioner, landed the top investigators' job at the IPPC. He had headed Scotland Yard's anti-corruption squad, dubbed the "Untouchables", which targeted such villains as the then police sergeant Gurpal Virdi for sending race hate mail to himself (which he didn't) and superintendent Ali Desai for fiddling his expenses (which he didn't). At the same time the Untouchables left a raft of unanswered questions about a lot of dubious murder investigations involving serious allegations of police corruption – including those of the murders of Stephen Lawrence and the private investigator Daniel Morgan.

In *Untouchables*, their book on Clark's anti-corruption exploits, authors and journalists Michael Gillard and Laurie Flynn chronicle Clark's "anti-corruption" career from his time in the flying squad, his management of Stoke Newington nick when it was rife with corruption, through a series of alarming cases. They describe him as the "J. Edgar Hoover of British policing" and "for 34 years the gatekeeper of the Yard's secrets".

The tough interview panel that considered him for the supposedly "independent" IPPC job contained two of his former Met mates, including Dave Wood, who Clark himself had appointed to his anti-corruption squad back in the 1990s.

Meanwhile Daniel Morgan's brother Alistair, who has been pressing for a public inquiry ever since Daniel's inquest heard that police officers had been involved in his death, is again protesting about Clark's role in "independent" inquiries. He says the Met police authority is proposing that an independent barrister should review the papers in his brother's case, in which Clark played a supervisory role. "What would happen to the IPCC's credibility and need to appear totally independent if this barrister found that Roy had acted improperly in that inquiry?" he asks.

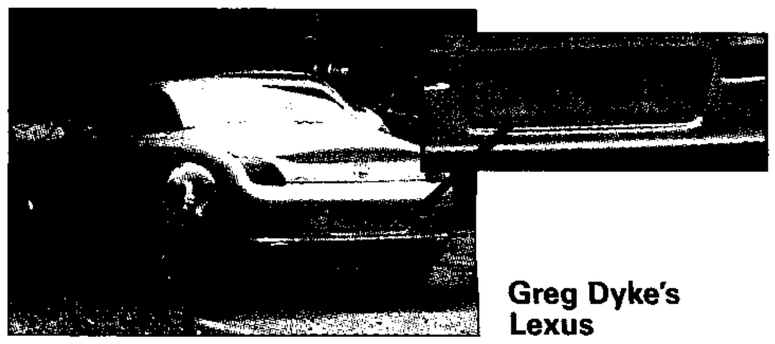
The de Menezes inquiry will be Clark's last task at the IPPC. In September he takes up a new role as director of criminal investigations for HM Revenue and Customs. Asked whether Clark should be heading an inquiry he may not be able to complete, the IPPC said that as "director" he had a strategic oversight of the inquiry: the day-to-day investigative work was being led by John Cummins, a former Cambridgeshire officer. The de Menezes family must be relieved.

WHEN news of the first London bombings arrived at the offices of high-powered management consultants Deloitte Touche, managers were quickly rallied to account for their staff to ensure that all were safe and well.

Alas, this kind gesture backfired embarrassingly. Through their rapid internal inquiries, they discovered that more than 100 of their consultants were unaccounted for. Not missing or injured in the bombings – just not at their desks or anywhere they were supposed to be.

An internal investigation is now trying to ascertain how 100 of the company's highest earners can slope off to the park/pub/cricket without their managers noticing.

JUST FANCY THAT!



Greg Dyke's Lexus

"WE understand that the IRA and its members will no longer have any contact with any foreign paramilitary and terrorist organisations," announced White House spokesman Scott McClellan after last week's statement from the Provos.

This translates as: "Please don't go round the world swapping your technical know-how for hard cash, like the way you taught those FARC bastards in Colombia how to fire mortars properly, and thus disrupt CIA-backed anti-drugs operations."

No one knows if such a plea will be successful; but the fact that the three Provos picked up at Bogota airport claiming to be eco-tourists are still on the run, may cause major ructions between the Bush and Blair administrations.

Northern Ireland secretary Peter Hain plans to grant an amnesty to wanted Provos; but should the Colombia Three turn up in Belfast anytime soon, the Americans and Colombians are both likely to seek their extradition, leading to transatlantic rows and a lot of fee income for Ulster's human rights lawyers as they try to fight any deportation.

Following their conviction, the three – all experienced at improvising and using weapons – vanished. They are currently still believed to be in Latin America, possibly Venezuela.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"SUICIDE bombing is a way of life."
– Omar Bakri Mohammed, *Today* programme.

Street of Shame

"AS Charlotte and rugby hunk fail to kiss and make up on island of romance, is it the end of the affair?" asked the *Daily Mail* on 21 July, over an entire page of long-lens paparazzo pics (the kind it promised never to use after Princess Diana's death) of singer Charlotte Church and her boyfriend Gavin Henson on a beach in Antigua.

The couple were, the paper reported, "cold-shouldering each other… even while paddling in the warm blue waters – the perfect place for a frolic and a cuddle – they looked pointedly away from each other."

The paper's theory was somewhat undermined by the fact that in one of the pictures, Henson was standing directly beside Church proudly sporting a prominent and impressive erection. Not a problem for the *Mail*, however: it simply airbrushed out the offending organ, ensuring that the front of his Speedos were modestly flat and the spark had well and truly gone from their relationship.

WHEN Richard Ellis, the *Sunday Telegraph*'s executive editor, absented himself from the newsroom on Friday 22 July – the busiest day of the week, and the day after four more bomb attacks in London – colleagues presumed he was going to investigate the fatal shooting by police that morning of a suspected terrorist in south London or to follow the hunt for the four would-be suicide bombers. Ellis has recently chided hacks for their work-rate and banned them from making doctors' or dentists' appointments in office hours, so clearly he was leading by example.

As the day wore on, however, a posse of hacks marched into deputy editor Matthew D'Ancona's office to complain that the paper had come to a standstill. Not only was Ellis away from his desk – so was Focus editor Jacqui Fuller, which meant that her pages couldn't be produced.

It transpired that Ellis had taken Fuller, with whom he has been conducting an increasingly passionate affair, to watch the cricket at Lord's. Happily, when the breathless couple eventually returned to the office that evening, they found time to agree to the paper's front-page exclusive: the scandal of home secretary Charles Clarke going ahead with his family holiday rather than staying at his post at such a sensitive time.

FOR most TV editors, a programme presented by one of their paper's star columnists would be a shoo-in as pick of the day – but the *Sun*'s Jane Moore was relegated to second place last Thursday when her channel 4 documentary *Supermarket Secrets* went out at 9pm.

What was on the other side that was preferred by TV columnist Anila Baig? Ricky Gervais' *Extras*, which just happened to feature as its guest star that week Ross Kemp… husband of *Sun* editor Rebekah Wade.

The tales of the teenage wizard prove you're never too old for a bit of magic. With help from best friends Hormone and Ron, Harry faces another school year, complete with fierce contests on the Quidditch field. *'Yours' magazine*

Number crunching

£50,000

- Damages paid to man falsely accused of being a paedophile by the Sun
- Damages paid to paedophile falsely accused of chatting up an adult by Vanity Fair

NOTHING in the brief *Guardian* career of Dilpazier Aslam – even the "exclusive interview" he conducted back in March with Shabina Begum, the girl whose legal fight to wear the jilbab was backed by Hizb ut-Tahir, the same radical group of which he himself was a member – became him like the leaving of it.

When the paper belatedly decided on 22 July that his "continuing membership of the organisation was incompatible with his continued employment by the company", it was not without a last shriek of defiance on its website.

A lengthy rant claimed that "right-wing bloggers in the US were behind the targeting" of Mr Aslam, pointing out that "the 'blogosphere' can be used to mount obsessively personalised attacks at high speed", before mounting one of its own, on "Scott Burgess, a blogger who spends his time indoors posting repeated attacks on the *Guardian*".

And who was the author of this piece which sneered at bloggers for their anonymity and the speed at which they rushed to judgement on the net? "A staff reporter."

FOR MORE than three years cartoonist Martin Rowson has filled a half-page of the Saturday *Times* with a Hogarthian depiction of some literary or political knees-up he's attended that week. Now he has been "let go".

But not without a parting shot. Close study of the characters in his final *Times* picture last month (of a party at the Gay Hussar) shows that the outstretched arms of cartoonist Steve Bell and *Mirror* hack Kevin Maguire spell the letter F. The raised arms of Tory peer Lord Baker and former *Tribune* editor Mark Seddon make a U…

Oh dear! The figures are posed in such a way that they spell out the phrase FUCK BROCK – a reference to George Brock, the pisspoor Saturday editor of the *Times*, who apparently found Rowson's drawings "too wordy" for his taste.

Rowson isn't the only *Times* contributor who wants to fuck Brock. Columnist Jonathan Meades was so incensed by the ham-fisted rewriting of his copy that he fired off the following email to Brock recently: "What kind of arsehole are you, precisely? You cannot draw, you cannot write, yet you presume to tell me and Rowson what to do." Answer came there none.

SECONDS out, round three. The welterweight bout between former *Daily Express* night editor Ted Young and Richard "Dirty" Desmond reopens later this month, before a capacity crowd at Croydon industrial tribunal.

As *Eye* readers will recall, the epic contest began last September when Young neglected to give due prominence in the *Express* to the death of ageing rocker Carl Wayne, formerly of the Move. "You'd have to be a seriously old cunt to remember that guy," he told newsroom colleagues.

Alas! The deceased happened to be a chum of wannabe rock drummer Dirty Desmond, who happened to be in the newsroom at the time – and who promptly put his tub-thumping skills to use by decking his night editor with a blow to the solar plexus.

Young then engaged the services of Keith "Rottweiler" Schilling, whose recent high-profile successes include Naomi Campbell's victory over the *Mirror* and a libel payout for Nicole Kidman from the *Sun*. But his demands for generous compensation from dirty Des were rebuffed, so on 25 August he takes his case to the tribunal.

Young intends to subpoena all the main *Express* apparatchiks, including Dirty Des's pathetic sidekick Paul Ashford. Embarrassment galore is expected – unless Desmond throws in the towel first.

ACROSS the land on Sunday night, *Daily Telegraph* readers were hunched over their trannies, hoping for news of the chart position of *People I Don't Know Are Trying To Kill Me*, the eloquent reaction to the London bombings which also happens to be the debut single by the paper's pop critic Neil McCormick *(see Bomb-balls, page 11)*.

Would it be number one? Top Ten? Top 40? Would it even scrape the top 150? Sadly, no. After nearly a full week on sale, and despite no fewer than three lengthy pieces in the *Telegraph* plugging his opus (one pointing out that "in the terrible void left by the bombing, people were eager in some way to respond"), the download-only track had sold a grand total of… eight copies.

THE Barclay brothers' hiring of Michael Howard's communications director Guy Black as their new director of corporate affairs provoked much speculation as to why a newspaper group needed such a highly-paid post. Whatever the twins' motivation, it clearly wasn't to reward Black for the services of his live-in lover Mark Bolland.

The *Sunday Telegraph* published a report earlier this month on Lady Colin Campbell's novel *Empress Bianca*, claiming that friends of the billionaire socialite Lily Safra were furious that the book was "a thinly veiled account" of her life – but in which the central character murders two of her four husbands.

The paper's new editor Sarah Sands only decided to publish the claims after Bolland, whom Safra employs as her public relations adviser, played down the significance of the novel. He insisted that Safra did not know of its existence and had never litigated in the past. "It's not like her," he said. "This is, remember, a work of fiction."

The following week Bolland forced Sands to issue her first – grovelling – apology as editor. "We understand that our linking of Mrs Safra's name with that of the novel's central character has greatly upset her," it said. "We very much regret this and apologise unreservedly to Mrs Safra for any embarrassment caused."

Safra subsequently hired the lawyer Anthony Julius to fire off a letter to Lady Colin's London publisher, Arcadia Books, demanding that it recall its entire print run, destroy all copies of the book and scrap plans to publish it in America. Quite something for a "work of fiction".

> Peter Clarke, a Metropolitan Police deputy assistant commissioner and head of Scotland Yard's anti-terrorist branch, said police still "needed urgently to trace" the men – who the public have been warned to approach.
>
> *Daily Telegraph*

IN AN an apparently suicidal act of insubordination, *Sunday Express* editor Martin Townsend has run a leader in praise of tolerance.

It was prompted by the story of a German airman, shot down over Britain in 1944, who exchanged his watch for a packet of cigarettes with one of the RAF rescuers who hauled him from the sea. Sixty-one years on, he has been reunited with his rescuer – and with his watch, in exchange for another packet of fags.

"What a touching story," the *Express* cooed. "They might have been fighting on opposite sides but they were honourable men… Our old enemies have become our new companions. There is nothing finer than forgiving the misdeeds of the past."

Short of printing an article warning that too much time spent in the porn-trade makes you blind, it's hard to imagine anything more likely to enrage the paper's owner, Richard "Dirty" Desmond. His unswerving conviction, repeated many times to his staff over the years, is that "all Germans are fucking Nazis". He made the point in spectacular fashion only last year, when it looked as if the *Telegraph* titles might be bought by the German group, Axel Springer. At a meeting with *Telegraph* bosses, Dirty Des strutted up and down the room shouting "Sieg Heil" and making Nazi salutes before leading his *Express* colleagues in a chorus of "Deutschland Uber Alles".

We must hope, for Townsend's sake, that Desmond is more willing to forgive the misdeeds of his editors than the misdeeds of the Hun.

"Thirty-two percent of British Muslims think western society is decadent and immoral and should be brought to an end," shrieked the *Telegraph* last Saturday in vast red-lettering on the front page.

The YouGov choke-on-your-breakfast statistic was not quite what it seemed, however. As page 6 of the paper revealed, the two questions asked were: "Western society is decadent and immoral and should be brought to an end, *but only by non-violent means*" – to which 31 per cent of respondents agreed; and "Western society is decadent and immoral and should be brought to an end, *if necessary by violence*" – to which just 1 per cent agreed, a number so far within the margin of error (usually 4-5 per cent) as to be completely meaningless.

DR THOMAS Stuttaford, the *Times*'s veteran medical pundit, is dismayed by the threat of "stringent regulation" for vitamin pills.

"The government suggests, just like an old-fashioned nanny telling Master Tommy to finish his greens, that instead of vitamin supplements we should not be so remiss about taking our five helpings of fruit and vegetables a day," he wrote last week. "Good advice, but it is a reasonable bet that many of the fruits they recommend are more likely to cause trouble to someone than the near-harmless vitamins, when these are taken in the correct amount."

Still, he added, at least vitamin supplements haven't been outlawed altogether – "as was feared". It was certainly feared by Dr Stuttaford, who has written several *Times* articles recently telling readers that these pills are far better for them than fruit and veg.

Curiously, however, Dr Tom has yet to inform these readers of one small fact. He writes a regular (paid) column for the monthly catalogue of Healthspan – Britain's largest online retailer of, er, vitamin supplements.

HACKWATCH: WHEN POLLY MET GLENDA

"IT WAS love-all in the stands at Wimbledon yesterday," the *Daily Mirror* reported on 4 July, "as Sienna Miller nibbled Jude Law's ear. The besotted movie pair distracted spectators from the action on Centre Court with their constant canoodling…" Yet a mere two weeks later the *Mirror* dismissed Law as "a rather seedy, petulant man who's losing his hair – and his sex appeal". All because he'd been having sex with the nanny.

How the Glendas rejoiced! "It is impossible not to experience a frisson of pure pleasure at Jude Law's betrayal of Sienna Miller with the nanny," Vannessa Feltz chortled in the *Express*. "The fact that Law strayed, even though his betrothed is hailed as the ultimate woman every single one of us dreams of looking like, is balm to our souls." Only one conclusion could be drawn: that Sienna, though beautiful, must be "unbearably boring", "a pain in the rear end" and "lousy in bed".

But then Vanessa remembered that she hadn't felt so jubilant when her own husband cheated on her. In her *Daily Star* column two days later, she suddenly came over all sympathetic: "Sienna, honey, I've got more than an inkling of what you're going through. My old man's affair was plastered all over the press and I got my first glimpse of the bird he was bonking on the pages of a newspaper." It was left to the *Sun*'s Caroline Palmer to pursue the case against Law's fiancé: "Letting the nanny go away to stay with your partner in the US... what were you thinking, Sienna?" Another of the *Sun*'s monstrous regiment of Glendas, Jane Moore, quoted Sienna's mother: "Some men just can't keep it in their trousers." But she was effortlessly outdone by Anila Baig, the *Sun*'s new veil-wearing Muslim Glenda: "Men! They're all the flaming same."

Upmarket papers also have their Glendas these days, of course. "For those of us who don't actually know the people involved, the story has all the gruesome fascination of a fairy-tale turned Grimm," drooled the *Guardian*'s Jess Cartner-Morley. The *Observer*'s Barbara Ellen couldn't contain her glee. "When the story broke I spent the entire day cackling like a witch. Over the next few days I could be found standing in newsagents with five different newspapers and a Twirl on top in readiness for my morning cup of coffee (avec gloat). It didn't matter that I didn't know Law and didn't want to. I loved what was happening." Julie Burchill, however, felt "totally betrayed" by Jude. How, she demand in the *Times*, could he betray his luscious girlfriend "for someone smelling of baby-sick"?

But why should the Glendas have all the fun? The story was perfect column-fodder for the equally huge army of Polly Fillers. The *Sunday Telegraph* cleared a news page to allow Kathy Lette and Jemima Lewis to debate the Jude Law issue ("Saint or sinner?") – and added a further ream of drivel by Rebecca Tyrrel. "Nannies, just like the children and pets they look after, need to know where they stand," she argued. "We had a lesbian nanny who downloaded pornography on to my computer while she was baby-sitting. It was very clear that she was crying out for something and I believe that something was the boundaries I had failed to set."

Nannies – aren'tcha sick of 'em?! "If you are looking for a history of Nightmare Nannies, may I invite you to walk this way," Rosie Millard urged *Daily Mail* readers. "I have had nannies such as Jo, a bewildered girl from Sussex who lasted eight hours before throwing in the towel, and Claire, a humourless Aberdonian who decided to feed the children strapped into chairs on top of the kitchen table..." And so Millard's dinner-party recitation continued – through the "utterly gormless" Lucy to the "brazen" Genevieve – for more than 1,000 words.

For Helen Kirwan-Taylor in the *Independent*, Jude Law's affair "only serves to reinforce my long-held views: that nannies are the enemy… Most I have employed have not only been indiscreet, disloyal and lazy, but also resentful of our lifestyle, which happened to be subsidising theirs. After all, how many entry-level professionals are offered free accommodation in some of the best parts of town with the use of a new BMW and with their food, taxes, insurance and telephones all paid for?"

"Nannies v. mothers: It's war" agreed Bel Mooney in the *Times*, recalling one who not only "secretly fed my son tinned potatoes" but also borrowed Bel's underwear. "I remember being absurdly annoyed that she had ignored the M&S briefs and stolen only the silk cami-knickers with matching bras. Who did she think she was to be so fussy?"

Time for the husband's point of view. "The nanny with whom Jude Law spent rather too much time after lights out was mighty attractive," observed an envious Jasper Gerard in the *Sunday Times*. "Unusually so, you might think. For as husbands will tell you, when nannies are chosen by wives they tend not to be, well, supermodel gorgeous… It might be coincidence, but wives are powerful in my Kentish village, and many of the nannies are Bulgarian. We agreed on a lovely Swede, but strangely, months later I found my letter appointing her hidden behind the Aga." Sure enough, he got "a Bulgarian 200-pounder" instead.

Nick Cohen, who usually pontificates on war and liberalism, disclosed in the *Evening Standard* that he too was "following the Jude Law-Sienna Miller affair with a keen interest", despite having no interest in showbiz. He was particularly excited by Jude's claim that he slept with the nanny because Sienna was tired from her work and didn't have enough time for him. "Law's explanation," he mused, "is one of those excuses so many of us might have tried – if only we had dared."

Even the Tory MP Michael Gove found the story irresistible. "What does it say about us men that we so often forsake beauty, trust and loyalty for the taste of an illicit thrill?" he asked in the *Times*. "How far have we really advanced since the days of Adam, the apple and the snake in the grass?"

Only one person can answer that question – by chance, the one pundit in Britain who has yet to pronounce on the affair. Where is William Rees-Mogg when we need him?

THE SEVEN PAGES OF MAN

DANDY Dennis the Menace

SUN Page three

TIMES Sports headlines

GUARDIAN Comment and analysis

TELEGRAPH Leader

DAILY MAIL Letters to the editor

LOCAL EVENING NEWS Births, Marriages and Deaths

GORDON BROWN's reinvention of the economic cycle has at least exposed the danger of adopting a simplistic golden rule to convince the city of a chancellor's economic competence.

If the office of national statistics had not conveniently gifted Brown a couple of juicy budget surpluses generated by his predecessor Kenneth Clarke's fiscal policies, the chancellor would almost certainly have had to raise taxes to meet his rule that the books must balance over the cycle.

But with economic growth falling and government budget deficits worsening, many experts believe that would have sparked a recession. In other words, the chancellor who promised an "end to boom and bust" would have ushered in a significant bust, possibly around the time he hopes to move in to No 10.

Future chancellors will rarely be bequeathed several billions in budget surpluses to draw on when things are looking a bit shaky (the next one certainly won't). A better rule for them might be: don't tie yourself to an inflexible golden rule – and find a friendly statistician.

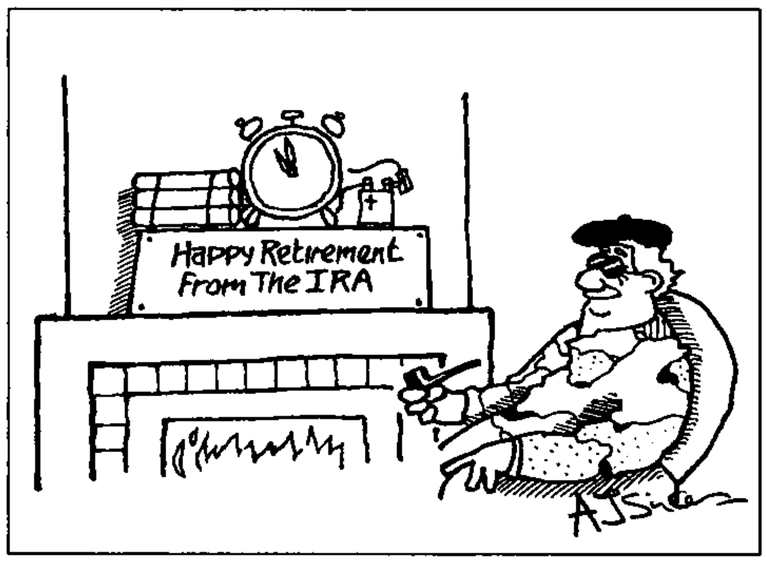
AN extraordinary spat has broken out between former Labour MP for Durham, Gerry Steinberg, and his less than fragrant replacement, Roberta Blackman Woods, who was gifted on the local party courtesy of an all "wimmin" shortlist.

Blackman Woods has lost no time annoying local members, many of whom are threatening to walk out over her arrogant attitude. But it is her treatment of local party employees that has really enraged Steinberg and led to him writing a ferocious letter to her, which he has circulated to former MP colleagues and local councillors.

"One of your former colleagues warned me that you could not be trusted," he writes. "I made a huge error in giving you the benefit of the doubt."

Steinberg had sought – and thought he had received – undertakings that the two constituency workers, Donna and Christine, would continue to work for the new MP. But one worker has been eased out and another obliged to accept an offer that Steinberg claims in his letter allows Blackman Woods "not to have to comply with the employment relations act". Says Steinberg: "To discover that a Labour MP was doing exactly what Tory employers were doing 15 years ago is nothing short of reprehensible."

Deploring Blackman Woods' "manipulative and deceitful ways", a furious Steinberg ends his letter to his replacement: "I am also told that you are informing colleagues in Westminster that you never offered Donna or Christine jobs in the first place. If this is the case, you are a liar." Ouch!



"NEW" Labour panjandrums have found a novel way to purge long-serving, poorly paid staff attached to the parliamentary Labour party's resource office.

Presided over by the genial Alan Howarth for nearly three decades, workers who provide much of the research and information requested by Labour MPs began worrying about their future when Howarth was sent to the Lords. His replacement was announced as former Labour Party regional official and all-round hatchet person, Fiona Gordon.

Gordon came to prominence under the iron-stilettoed reign of Margaret McDonagh as general-secretary, and later progressed to the Labour whips' office where she honed her skills in doing down lefty troublemakers under chief whip Hilary Armstrong.

Gordon's first comradely interaction with her PLP resource office staff was to tell them they all had to reapply for their own jobs. In most organisations this usually means P45s all round – which may also be Fiona Gordon's intention for her wards. The announcement was made at a meeting of the parliamentary committee – the backbench "shop stewards" group of MPs – two weeks into the parliamentary recess, when most MPs had left Westminster and only when the Dear Leader had left the meeting.

Had the news been broken while Blair was still in the room he would have been embarrassed into requesting further information and a report, thus buying time for the threatened staff. As it is, Gordon will probably have achieved her nefarious aims by the time the PLP reassembles in the autumn. New Labour, new working practices!

THE early-day motion put before the Commons by Labour MP Shahid Malik two weeks ago in support of striking cleaners in parliament was backed by a bizarre letter to MPs and peers from the deputy general-secretary of the Transport & General workers' union, Jack Dromey, former left-wing firebrand and husband of solicitor-general Harriet Harman.

Dromey was appalled by the conditions under which the contracted-out workers operate: £5 per hour (recently up from the minimum wage of £4.85), 12 days per year holiday and no sick pay or pension arrangements, all for a job that often involves starting work at 4am. While these terms compare terribly with those for cleaners directly employed by parliament – who "enjoy" the relative riches of £8 per hour, 30 days holiday, sick pay and access to pensions – Dromey was reluctant to blame their employers.

"To be frank, the two contractors, Mitie and Emprise, are not the problem", he claimed. "The problem is that the parliamentary authorities let the two contracts on a very tight basis. We have met with both contractors and Mitie has now 'scraped the barrel' of the monies available in the contract to make a modest increase to £5 an hour".

The old lefty clearly forgot that it takes two to tango and parliament could only have negotiated a cheap contract if Mitie and Emprise were prepared to use Dickensian employment contracts. As for scraping the barrel of what Mitie can afford, er, not quite. In June the company announced record £47m profits to the stock market and gave its directors bumper pay rises: chief executive Ian Stewart's pay went up 18 percent to £638,000 (at least £300 per hour) while the man in charge of "support services" (ie cleaning), Colin Hale, trousered a £225,000 bonus to see his wage go up to nearly half a million quid (about £250 per hour).

SIR Alistair Graham, commissioner for standards in public life, was miffed at the way changes to the role of ministers' special advisers were ushered in recently with no public or parliamentary announcement, let alone debate.

Last month the remit of special advisers was changed (through an obscure prerogative power called an "order in privy council") from the task of "advising" ministers to the much more wide-ranging job of "assisting" them, prompting concerns that they will tell civil servants what to do and threaten the supposedly politically neutral civil service. It was only when Sir Alistair spotted the change and put out a strongly worded press release that anybody knew about it.

The standards commissioner was particularly peeved at the "hole in the corner" way in which the change had been made. But he shouldn't have been surprised. The government has been promising but not delivering a civil service act for years, largely because taking one through parliament would involve debating some of the murkier ways of the "new" Labour government, and giving special advisers a freer rein would be fiercely resisted by parliamentary dinosaurs who continue to believe quaintly in accountable ministers and an impartial civil service. Far better to use an "order in privy council" and hope nobody hears about it.

A couple of days later, when Labour peer Lord Sheldon raised the subject of the long-delayed civil service bill, peers took the chance to berate government minister Lord Bassam, a former KPMG partner, on the subject. Tory Lord Peyton was far from comforted by Bassam's claims of limited influence for special advisers and complained that "complete with their party political germs", they were "a step, and a substantial step in the direction of a single-party state". Bassam said there were only "77 or 78" of them and told the noble lord to get a sense of proportion. So nothing to worry about there then.

The cabinet office, meanwhile, has issued a revised code of conduct for special advisers. After protests from the standards commissioner against proposals to allow the political appointees to "convey instructions" to civil servants, the code has been watered down so they must "request" mandarins to do things. The more polite wording isn't expected to make much difference.

THE House of Commons has just approved the second reading of the Crossrail bill, legislation for the underground rail link across London which is scheduled for completion in 2013, conveniently a year late for the Olympics.

Eye readers will be relieved to hear that the Crossrail team has got its priorities firmly in order. Following "stakeholder consultation workshops" they are carrying out an equality impact assessment (EqIA) to consider, as they put it, "likely impacts that may affect the priority groups of age, disability, race, faith, gender, sexual orientation and economic deprivation".

Phew! Now the tricky issues are out of the way, all that remain are the small matters of raising £11bn… and digging the hole to pour it into.

Number crunchings

12 years

■ Time Robert Kilroy-Silk managed to stay in Labour before falling out with party and resigning

9 months

■ Time Robert Kilroy-Silk managed to stay in UKIP before falling out with party and resigning

5 months

■ Time Robert Kilroy-Silk managed to stay as leader of his own party before falling out with himself and resigning

Number crunchings

12 days ■ Holiday entitlement of contracted cleaners at House of Commons

81 days ■ Length of MPs' summer recess from House of Commons

LATEST APPOINTMENTS

WAR and privatisation are providing plenty of job opportunities for former military and civil service top brass once they leave the government's employ.

The latest report from the advisory committee on business appointments, which vets the private appointments of senior staff leaving public service (and generally demands a few months' "quarantine" between old and new jobs for the sake of form), shows that **Admiral Lord Boyce**, former chief of the defence staff, retired in November 2003 and became an adviser to the American **Computer Sciences Corporation (CSC)** in July 2004. Boyce told the *Eye* that he chiefly advised CSC on its bid for the £6bn "defence infrastructure initiative" contract, a massive high-tech deal to upgrade battlefield communications.

He also became a non-executive director of warship firm **VT Group** (where he joins former Labour minister Baroness Blackstone), and a director of **WS Atkins**, a PFI firm which sells the ministry of defence everything from barracks to armoured cars.

Air Marshal Christopher Colville, once in charge of RAF training, flew into the chairman's seat at **Westland Helicopters**; while **General Jack Deverell**, ex-commander of Nato's northern forces, is now a senior military consultant to computer firm **EDS**. He has also started his own anti-terrorism school, called SOE International, which gives businessmen security training in Gloucestershire. **Sir Robert Walmsley**, former head of defence procurement, procured himself a job as a director of US arms firm the **EDO Corporation**.

A number of top diplomats have done well too. **Sir James Hodge**, consul-general in Hong Kong, has now joined private intelligence firm **Hakluyt;** while **Sir Michael Pakenham**, once ambassador to Warsaw, is now on the board of French arms firm **Thales**. Pakenham, who has a strong intelligence background having chaired the joint intelligence committee from 1998-2000, also became an adviser to five investment firms, including Russian-born billionaire Len Blavatniks' **Access Industries.**

The growing privatisation market has also helped the careers of former civil servants. **Andrew Pinder**, Tony Blair's one-time "E- Envoy", joined the board of **Vertex**, which sells "call centre" and "benefit services" to local government. (This is in addition to his job with government computer supplier **Entrust**.) **Ruth Carnall,** who ran the department of health's "change programme", is now a director of **Care UK**, a health firm involved in selling operations to the NHS at independent treatment centres. She also advises **KPMG**, which is deeply involved in the PFI process, and **Verita**, a management consultancy set up by NHS managers to work for… the NHS.

Eugenie Turton, who was John Prescott's director of housing, is now a director of the **Wates Group** building firm which is trying to win contracts under Two Jags' new homes initiative. She also works for **Veredus**, a subsidiary of Capita which specialises in recruiting executives for local councils and the public sector.

CON-SULTANTS

THE last *Eye* reported how management consultant McKinsey was dropping the prime minister's "blue sky thinker" Lord Birt as its adviser, in the firm's words "to avoid any potential misunderstanding… though in fact no conflict ever arose".

So there can be nothing untoward in the lucrative home office contracts awarded to McKinsey in the last couple of years, unearthed by parliamentary questions from Tory peer Lord Hanningfield, under which payments have so far reached £9m.

One of the main deals handed to McKinsey was an "organisation design" project for the disastrous national offender management service (Noms) as part of a contract for which only McKinsey tendered in 2003/04.

Until early last year the head of the probation service (which merged with the prison service to become Noms) was Eithne Wallis, for whom Lord Birt has recently left his wife.

Ms Wallis became "change director" for Noms in February last year before moving to another part of the home office in August. Earlier this year McKinsey began working on the organisation's "change programme".

Any suggestion of conflicts of interest in doling out consultancy contracts at taxpayers' expense obviously remains cynical nonsense.

IN *Eye* 1135 we reported with some incredulity, following a series of parliamentary questions from Labour MP Austin Mitchell, the number of consultants employed by certain government departments. Environment topped the list by shelling out to 95 of them in just one year.

Treasury minister John Healey replied to Mitchell by placing a list of the consultants hired by his department between 2002 and 2005 in the Commons library – a standard device for dealing with answers that are too voluminous for Hansard or too embarrassing. The *Eye* has now seen the names and it looks like both reasons might justify the low-key reply: the list runs to more than 350 separate consultants ranging from the usual favourites such as KPMG and PwC to scores of smaller firms and former treasury mandarins, including the chancellor's erstwhile, er, efficiency guru Sir Peter Gershon.

MPs are again wondering what is the point of the lobbying industry's toothless regulator, the Association of Professional Political Consultants (APPC).

It has just issued a two-page statement condemning the appointment of Lord O'Neill (until recently MP Martin O'Neill, former trade and industry select committee chair) to the advisory board of Media Strategy, the company run by John Major's former press secretary, Charles Lewington.

The APPC code of conduct prohibits financial arrangements between companies and politicians or their advisers. Clause eight specifically bans companies from "employing any MP, MEP, sitting peer etc" in any capacity – a move that was supposed to restore industry confidence after the "Lobbygate" and cash-for-questions scandals of the 1990s.

However, the code is voluntary and companies who do not want to abide by it either don't join the APPC or simply resign from it. This is what Media Strategy did before it was to be sanctioned over O'Neill's appointment.

It claimed that as the peer was on the advisory board, he would not be involved in lobbying so the rules did not apply. The APPC did not agree. Its statement said: "The APPC management committee deeply regret Media Strategy's decision to resign as it is our belief that all companies who provide political consultancy services should promote the principles of transparency and an absolute ban on any financial relationship with politicians and their advisers… The appointment to Media Strategy in any paid capacity compromised the profession's integrity."

But all this is hot air. As Lib Dem Norman Baker observes: "The code is not worth the paper it's written on. If voluntary regulation doesn't work, we have to look to compulsory regulation."

Lord O'Neill of Clackmannan is unrepentant. "As a member of the advisory board, I will not be actively engaged in lobbying and will be doing nothing that conflicts with my role as a peer." In any event, he added, there were other (unnamed) parliamentarians who "were far more intensely involved". So that's all right then.

FAMOUS WRISTBANDS

Karl Marx's Make Property History Campaign

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

MARTA ANDREASEN, the accountant who blew the whistle on ropy book-keeping of the European Union's central funds, has opened a third court case against the EU authorities.

Earlier this year she withdrew two other petitions, leaving something of a mystery as to her plans. The new case, which was registered at the European court of first instance in Luxembourg in June, gives the European commission until early October to respond.

Andreasen's new case, worded in French rather than in English, seeks to overthrow a decision taken by the present European commission, announced in October last year, to fire her from her position as an EU official. It also seeks financial compensation.

The withdrawn cases sought a ruling against suspension from her senior position as accounting officer, and against being moved within the commission.

The new case will no doubt repeat her position, stated many times, that in Brussels there is "a culture of corruption". She has insisted that in the EU the "opportunities for fraud are open and they are taken advantage of. The most elementary precautions are neither taken nor even contemplated".

Andreasen was appointed chief accountant to the European commission in January 2002. Shortly after, she refused to sign accounts that she said she believed were unreliable.

EU-phemisms

THERE WILL BE NO FURTHER PILFERING OF FUNDS IN MY DEPARTMENT
WE'RE INVESTIGATING THESE ACCUSATIONS THAT YOU ARE CORRUPT
LE NEWS
FRAUD IN E.U.
OLAF

I've embezzled everything

We'll find out who wrote this and make their lives hell

FIVE TV

The Power of Nightmares (BBC2, 2004)

The New al-Qaeda (BBC2, 2005)

The Cult of the Suicide Bomber (Channel 4, 2005)

ALTHOUGH bomb-making and film-making are very different disciplines, they are linked by the absolute importance of timing. If a documentary goes out before a subject is primed in the public mind, it will make no impact. But, if it takes place at the height of a particular campaign, it can be accused of copycat opportunism.

So, while not even a hack would talk about luck in the context of recent British events, Peter Taylor and Kevin Toolis, documentarians with a long-time interest in terrorism, can feel that they've received a certain journalistic vindication. Having spent the last year working on series about Middle Eastern extremists, they now look like soothsayers rather than the doom-watchers they might have been branded if their programmes had gone out in June.

Both Taylor and Toolis can also feel smug about the predicament of a professional rival. When Adam Curtis's **The Power of Nightmares** was screened last year on BBC2, it was acclaimed by liberal Britain as a masterpiece. With his usual wry use of archive and sardonic commentary, Curtis argued that Bush and Blair had deliberately bigged-up (and even, in some instances, invented) the al-Qaeda threat in order to keep their electorates terrified and putting crosses next to the names of politicians who promise to protect the people.

Curtis said quietly at the time and will presumably repeat noisily in a scheduled lecture at this month's Edinburgh Television Festival that he wasn't saying there was no threat at all from terrorism. His point was that it was exaggerated for political gain. But, crucially, his third film used footage of senior Scotland Yard brass warning that an attack on Britain was a matter of "when not if" as an example of reckless scare-mongering.

The popularity of *The Power of Nightmares* at the time (a feature-length screening was even cheered and champagne-toasted by visiting American liberals at the Cannes Film Festival) came

"If you have been unaffected by tonight's programme, please phone and tell us, so that we can make it more upsetting"

because it tied in to the common view that all politicians were liars: if they were wrong about the 45-minute claim, why trust them on the fact that al-Qaeda was plotting to attack us at home? The flaw in this reasoning was that, while WMD had never been found in Iraq, al-Qaeda bombs had demonstrably been spotted in New York, Bali, Madrid and elsewhere. But Curtis was just very lucky with his timing.

Until now. BBC chairman Michael Grade recently pledged to remove all repeats from the BBC within 10 years. Well, here's a good start. *The Power of Nightmares* is now in the probably unique position of being an acclaimed, award-winning series that the BBC will never ever be able to screen again or release on DVD.

In fact, when the series was repeated last year to meet public demand, it was already subtly different from the original. One of Curtis's BBC colleagues, Peter Taylor, had demanded and won the removal from the series of allegedly scare-mongering footage from a series of his about the al-Qaeda threat.

A second vindication for Taylor is that his own latest series – **The New al-Qaeda** – seems at first sight to have benefited from perfect timing. The first programme, for example, set out to show that, while the terror network was not a global octopus with bin Laden in charge, there was a support system in place through the Internet which might be used by small, self-sufficient cells in Europe: a rough description, if early assumptions turn out to be accurate, of the working methods of the London bombers.

But churls might question to what extent Taylor – and Kevin Toolis, with his perfectly-timed title **The Cult of the Suicide Bomber** – have proved to be "right." Both have had to do frantic recutting and rewriting to make their series transmittable and neither film in their original versions gave any sense that a devastating attack by British-born Muslims was imminent. In a game of Spot the Ball, there are no marks for just getting your X in the goalmouth.

There's also a lot of backpatting among BBC executives about the fact that the joint commissioning of the Curtis and Taylor series (made by the same department, as it happens) is a perfect example of "BBC balance". In fact, it might be argued that the backing of two completely contradictory accounts of the same situation is more like a man claiming to be a shrewd gambler when he has simply put money on every horse running. Curtis, though, a year after he took the documentary Derby, is the clear faller.

'Remote Controller'

MEDIA NEWS

THE BBC's commitment to provide news with the "highest possible levels of accuracy" – a pledge given after publication of the Neil report – is being undermined by a fetish for "greater public involvement in telling the big story".

Relying on "user-generated content" – ie any passing johnnie with a mobile – led to "an incident" being reported recently at Mile End as "Breaking News". A witness (a single source) on the phone told the BBC of "smoke and a burning smell". A suicide bomber perhaps?

The BBC then went live to "a passing BBC producer" for more. Police had "detained a man on the westbound Central line", he said, before confessing that the policeman who "briefed" him "didn't really seem to know what is going on". Half an hour later, police confirmed the "incident" was "nothing" and no arrest had been made.

INTERVIEWED for the *Indie*'s "My Life in Media" slot last Monday, Jonathan Agnew explained that his role as BBC cricket correspondent was not merely to commentate on Test matches but also "to serve all of the BBC's radio outlets with cricket news and analysis".

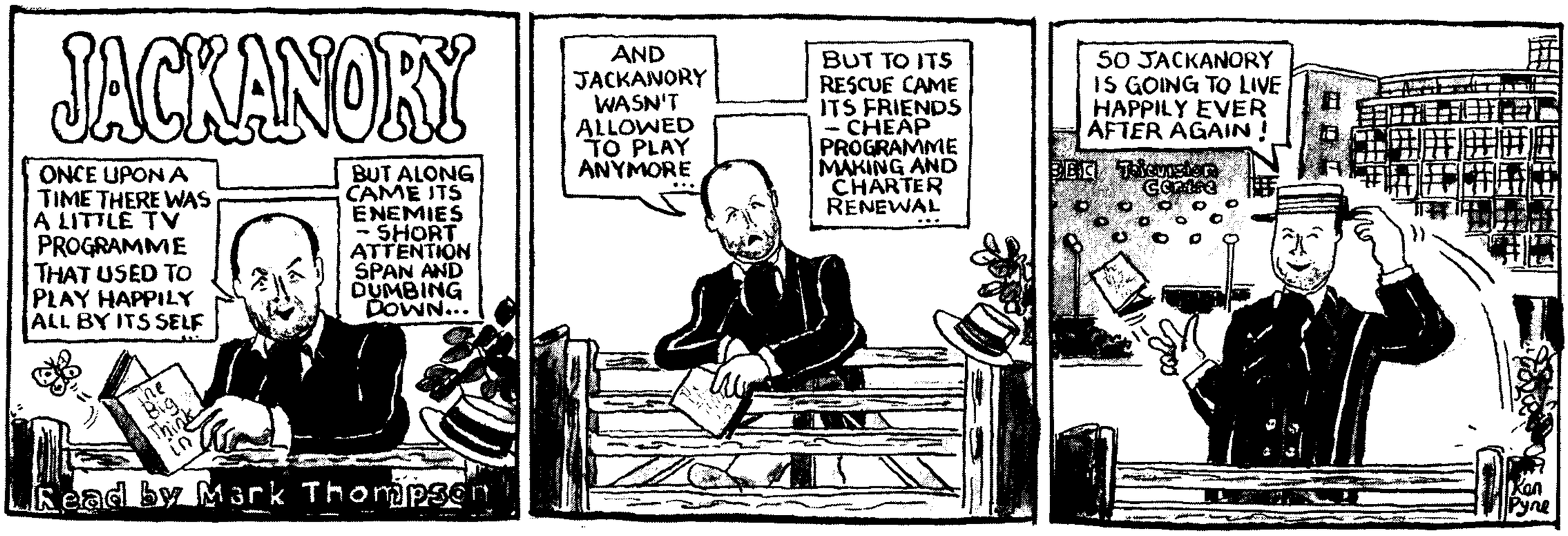
Yet what was Aggers up to that very day? Nobody knows. He left his mobile off all day (Monday should have been the fifth day of the first Test, remember) and could not be found. So, when Five Live conducted its post-match study of England's 239-run defeat, it had to rope in Pat Murphy, its man in the Midlands, to make up the four-man panel.

Agnew has form in this respect. Although he is the highest-paid radio sports correspondent he is also prone to going AWOL. While rain held up the start of play on the Sunday of the Lord's Test, instead of holding the fort at the *TMS* studio he promptly went back to his hotel for two hours!

GOING LIVE

NO great illumination when BBC News went live to Lucy Williamson for the latest on the police investigation into the bombings at Sharm el Sheikh.

"We're being told that there are British police here, but we're not being kept informed about what they're doing," she said.


JACKANORY
ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS A LITTLE TV PROGRAMME THAT USED TO PLAY HAPPILY ALL BY ITS SELF...
BUT ALONG CAME ITS ENEMIES - SHORT ATTENTION SPAN AND DUMBING DOWN...
The Big Think In
Read by Mark Thompson
AND JACKANORY WASN'T ALLOWED TO PLAY ANYMORE...
BUT TO ITS RESCUE CAME ITS FRIENDS - CHEAP PROGRAMME MAKING AND CHARTER RENEWAL...
SO JACKANORY IS GOING TO LIVE HAPPILY EVER AFTER AGAIN!
BBC Television Centre
Ken Pyne

DUMB BRITAIN

Mastermind, BBC2
John Humphrys: Which breakfast cereal is slang for a period of imprisonment?
Contestant: Cheerios.

The Weakest Link, BBC2
Anne Robinson: Which animals feature in the book *Watership Down*?
Contestant: Was it beavers, Anne?

BBC Radio Bristol Afternoon Quiz
Presenter: How is the wife of a knight addressed?
Contestant: Senorita.

Greater Manchester Radio
Phil Wood: Which famous classical composer went deaf?
Contestant: Errr...
Female co-presenter: Think of a big dog.
Contestant: Bach.

A LACK of any facts failed to prevent Eddie Mair leading a discussion of the Stockwell shooting with three guests on BBC2's *Newsnight*.

First, solicitor Imran Khan revealed to Mair "I don't know the complete facts" before alleging that the shooting bore all the hallmarks of "an execution".

Next up was the head of the Independent Police Complaints Council, Nick Hardwick: "I don't know what happened – we have only just begun our investigation," he revealed.

Then it was down to the man from the Association of Chief Police Officers to "clarify" matters. As Mair said: "Chris Fox, you presumably don't know any more than the rest of us what actually happened. But what do you think about Imran Khan's notion that this was an execution?"

THE BBC's annual report has its share of inaccuracies too.

Celebrating the corporation's diverse sports coverage, it contains a picture of Phil Taylor throwing his arrows during the Ladbrokes world darts championship. Shame the tournament in question is contracted exclusively to… Sky Sports.

TRYING to get a fix on what the Met is actually doing to combat the Muslim menace isn't easy – not least because police chief Sir Ian Blair and his press briefers keep issuing statements which turn out to be untrue.

Still, the BBC's crime correspondent Neil Bennett has done a reasonable job trying to separate fact from fiction (even if his colleagues on the general newsbeat keep being hammered by Sky News and ITN).

Predictably Bennett's post is being axed as part of the BBC's latest round of cutbacks, while more money will be made available to broadcast endless PR puffs on News 24. That's the spirit!

THE "Creative Future" initiative, described by BBC director-general Mark Thompson as "the most important thing the BBC will do during 2005" reveals more new thinking at the Beeb.

"Is broadcasting on the way out?" was the issue discussed at the recent "innovation day" attended by "some of the BBC's biggest thinkers". Their vision is of a BBC that is both "gatekeeper and content creator" rather than merely a boring corporation that makes good programmes.

Indeed, "Future-looking Tom Loosemore, head of new media foresight" told colleagues that "we should make fewer hours of content". The march towards a future as a publisher-broadcaster "gatekeeping" for independent productions continues.

"IF YOU did a straw poll of people, one of things they would definitely not want to see on television would be live sex," declared MP Ann Widdecombe last November, backing a proposal by the pressure group Mediawatch to restore the power of pre-broadcast censorship to Ofcom.

"I couldn't agree more that censorship should be restored for these shows. If we don't, channels are just going to keep pushing the boundaries. Unless a channel faces criminal prosecution, it won't stop."

No doubt Ms Widdecombe will be taking the opportunity to discuss this matter with her new boss, Richard Desmond, who as well as hiring the deeply religious MP to write a weekly column in his *Daily Express* is the proprietor of Television X. This is the subscription channel that promises "throbbing amateur action and cock-tingling films, the hardest cunt-pounding action" and "the BEST value red hot sex ALL NIGHT long".

AD NAUSEAM

MORE on the World's Parochial Bank, HSBC: a Norwegian student at a Midlands University applied to the local branch to open an account. She was refused, on the grounds that her passport bore no UK entry or student visa.

Her student officer sent her back with a note explaining that although Norway was not an EU member, it was part of the European economic area (EEA). Nationals of EEA states can enter the UK for any amount of time without a visa.

A branch staffer from HSBC then rang the student officer, asking what the EEA was as he'd never heard of it. He also added that the query regarding the legality of the student's entry came from head office, which is strange, as HSBC's website boasts that its has "had a presence in the Nordic region since 1984… enabling our customers to benefit from the combined expertise and services available."

Number crunching

30

■ Hours it took Brazilian government to announce itself "shocked and perplexed" at shooting of Brazilian citizen by police in London

■ Number of Brazilian citizens shot by police in Brazil in one night last March in reprisal for crackdown on corruption

AT LAST the ordeal is over for Lucy Kelly, deputy general-secretary of Britain's biggest private sector union, Amicus.

Back in January Kelly was suspended on full pay (*Eye* 1125) following allegations that she had been less than forthcoming with the union's auditors about her knowledge of how Nelson Mendes, the ex-MSF head of finance, had siphoned off union funds (something he later admitted).

At a meeting of the union's executive last month, general-secretary Derek Simpson astonished colleagues by announcing that he had decided, on his own and over lunch, to let Kelly leave the union with a cheque for £150,000 in her pocket. She was also allowed to keep her union car.

Meanwhile, the investigation into missing union funds during the reign of former Amicus boss Roger "Currant Bun" Lyons is keeping two of the union's assistant general secretaries fully occupied. Tony Dubbins and Ed Sweeney have established that more than £130,000 of union funds was siphoned off into the bank accounts of senior Amicus officials during Lyons' tenure.

In addition, another member of the top brass, assistant general-secretary Rory Murphy, has jumped ship to become director of human resources for management consultants Morgan Chambers, who specialize in outsourcing – a bête noire for many trade unionists.

Murphy, who left Amicus with a cheque for £150,000 as part of a voluntary retirement deal, insists he is not a turncoat. Explaining his new role to *Personnel Today* magazine, Murphy said: "Trade unionists will be the consultants of the coming age. Maybe I'm the first, but I'm sure there will be more… The fact that there were 30 million trade union members in the 1970s and only six million now, show (*sic*) that the trade unions have won."

Now *that's* something for Amicus's bewildered members to ponder on the beach this summer.

'Blackleg'

JUST FANCY THAT!

AS POLICE ponder the fact that at least two of the London bombers attended a "team bonding" course at the National Whitewater Rafting Centre in Snowdonia in June, a clue emerges as to what may have attracted the devout Muslims to the activity.

According to the centre's website, www.ukrafting.co.uk, "North Wales is a Mecca for outdoor activities and a great escape to free the mind and relax."

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

AGENCY BARBEQUE
GOD, THE SKIN'S GOT REALLY BURNT AND CHARCOALY!
THEN MAYBE YOU SHOULD GET UP NOW AND EAT SOMETHING!
OOOH NO I COULDN'T DO THAT..... ...I'VE GOT A SHOOT IN A FEW DAYS!!!
SIZZLE! FRY!

DOING THE ROUNDS

THE Wessex cardiothoracic unit at Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust (SUHNT) is undergoing a £57m expansion and should be planning the recruitment of more staff. So why are jobs there under threat?

SUHNT was awarded a lone star by the healthcare commission and "significantly underachieved in financial management". The cardiac unit itself has a "£4m budget gap" and the trust has "devised a list of potential posts, which could be considered for redundancy without a major impact on income generation and designed to minimise the inevitable effect on clinical service delivery".

Without prior discussion with staff, the trust plans to save the "throughput jobs" that protect the unit's income and sacrifice the "quality jobs" which ensure patient satisfaction and safety. And the patients most likely to suffer are children. If Southampton loses the senior nurses responsible for leading and managing its cardiac liaison team (CLT), consultants believe the clinical services "cannot continue safely and undisturbed".

Cardiac liaison is an essential part of congenital heart services, supporting and educating families and patients in hospital and in the community. Heart defects and their treatments are now so complex that it requires time, and dedicated staff, to explain the nature of both and the impact on quality of life, as well as feeding back to, and educating, other staff members. The Bristol inquiry gave clear recommendations for better communication and support, and the Southampton team is regarded as one of the UK's best, as assessed by the paediatric cardiac services review. But alas, it doesn't make the trust any money.

Cutting the service may help balance the books in the short term, but the long term effect on staff morale and litigation could be dire. The CLT currently supports patients and families from 13 referring hospitals right through from ante-natal diagnosis to adulthood, and without them it is likely that complaints will increase. Patients will also turn up as (expensive) emergencies which could have been avoided by earlier intervention by the CLT.

The British Heart Foundation is so impressed by the role of the Southampton CLT that it has funded two community nurses to work with the team. What will happen if the CLT service is cut remains to be seen.

Paediatric cardiac treatment has always been the poor relation to adult services, generating less income and not driven by government targets. The £57m expansion is all for adults. Child surgery has never had the funding it has deserved and the government's tariff system for treatment is proving disastrous. The unit doesn't receive payment that reflects the cost and complexity of the work it does, which is one reason it's in debt. If Southampton loses it flagship liaison service, one of the best paediatric cardiac services in the country could take a nose dive and the Bristol inquiry will seem like a waste of £14m of taxpayers' money.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

SIGNAL FAILURES

TELLING a parliamentary committee that he did not have any plans to pull the plug on Railtrack when he really did wasn't the only lie Stephen Byers told as transport secretary.

Days after forcing the company into administration in October 2001, Byers assured the Commons that people who had risked their money on the botched Tory privatisation would not get a penny from the taxpayer: "We believe it would be wrong to make new money available and we will not do it." Six months later shareholders were offered the pre-administration value of £2.50 for each of their shares, an offer that the banks swiftly accepted but that many individuals ("grannies", in the words of one civil servant, who would "lose their blouses") refused.

So why did Byers relent? The answer, as ever, was to appease the bankers who had invested in Railtrack, including UBS Warburg, the former employer of Shriti Vadera, Gordon Brown's special adviser and architect of the administration scheme in the first place. While grannies in blouses could safely be ignored, the institutions on which the blessed private finance initiative depended could not. They had to be reassured that the government would not walk away from privately financed deals (despite the justification for the bankers' high returns being that they took all the risks), not least so that they would back the impending London Underground PPP being set up by one Shriti Vadera.

PS: UBS went on to become Network Rail's banking adviser, earning around £12m for arranging expensive debts to maintain the fiction that it was all in the private sector (cheaper borrowing using future track charges as collateral might have counted as public debt). The bank enjoyed a similarly handsome pay day in 1996 when it acted as midwife to the whole fiasco by arranging the original flotation of Railtrack.

AS THE plan to pass Railtrack's assets to Network Rail took shape early in 2002, Byers repeatedly claimed that Network Rail would be formed as a "company limited by guarantee" (CLG) in order to "put the interests of the travelling public first".

These may have been reasonable grounds for handing the railways to a government-owned company, but the use of an arcane CLG was nothing to do with improving the lot of put-upon commuters and everything to do with presenting government finances in the best light.

If a standard company with shares owned by the government had been used, the £9bn or so of debt it was taking on would have counted as public borrowing, something the chancellor had ordered Byers to avoid. By using a CLG, even though the taxpayer would have to cough up if Network Rail went bust, the treasury managed to persuade national statistician Len Cook that it was nothing to do with the government and could be safely ignored when measuring the scale of the public debt.

At one stage Cook faced a summons from the disgruntled shareholders to appear at the high court and explain his decision, only for it to be withdrawn before the end of the hearing.

As the *Eye* has pointed out, a number of accounting changes have come to light recently, all inexplicably in the government's favour, prompting more calls for an independent office of national statistics. Meanwhile Cook, who recently complained of being the "most abused civil servant in Britain", is retiring to his native New Zealand later this year, taking with him a CBE from the latest honours list.

THERE'S nothing better than warm summer weather to show where train companies' priorities really lie.

Passengers on Stagecoach's South West Trains have endured sweltering conditions because air-conditioning on some trains doesn't work when the outside temperature exceeds 28C (ie when it's most needed). SWT claimed that other cooling systems were probably available but would be too costly, despite having made £157m profit last year.

Passengers on other franchises have suffered too. An electricity cut in June trapped passengers for two hours on GNER trains in Cambridgeshire; temperatures inside reportedly exceeded 37C because air-conditioning stopped. In April 300 passengers were stuck for up to five hours near Stockport after equipment failure on a new Virgin Pendolino train. What did Virgin learn from the incident? Nothing, apparently.

Last month 220 passengers were incarcerated for seven hours on a broken Voyager train which had hit a cow. Virgin blamed the long delay on the train's "rural location" – not the Scottish Highlands but, er, just outside Oxford.

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

WHIPS AND CHAINS

MUCH embarrassment for the Labour party in Tony Blair's constituency of Sedgefield, where council tenants have voted emphatically against the council flogging off their homes. On a 73 percent turnout, 60 percent of tenants rejected the council's plan to sell 9,000 homes to the Sunderland Housing Group (SHG).

Before the ballot the Labour council and SHG had bombarded tenants with a propaganda campaign costing hundreds of thousands of pounds. It included door-to-door canvassing, glossy brochures and DVDs. Yet the opponents of privatisation won the argument. Perhaps it was because in Sedgefield you can smell the stink from Sunderland, where the transfer of the council's housing stock to the SHG housing association has led to big salaries and jobs for the boys (and girls) and a lot of hot air – plus a scandalously long housing waiting list and not very many houses being built (*Eyes passim*).

Two Sunderland Labour councillors who had the temerity to criticise SHG to the Commons council housing group have been threatened with disciplinary action by the Labour party. Cllr Bryn Sidaway told MPs: "If anyone has any doubts about not going down the privatisation road, or the transfer of council housing stock, get on a bus and go into Sunderland. What we've experienced is frightening." For this Cllr Sidaway, a former leader of Sunderland city council, faces suspension or having the whip withdrawn. Fellow councillor Mike Tansey, the *Eye*'s mole says, has received dire threats of a good whipping, but will not face any further action as long as he keeps his mouth shut.

The internal disciplinary procedures against Tansey and Sidaway have been handled by junior whip Cllr Paul Watson but were initiated by the chief whip of Sunderland's Labour group, Cllr Les Scott. He happens to be vice-chair of Sunderland Housing Group – so no conflict of interest there, then!

OUT SAUCE

BRADFORD council's attempt to flog off its buildings and outsource council services has come to a grinding halt amid allegations of impropriety against the council's "director of asset management".

Following an anonymous letter sent to the council hours before it was due to consider a £1.2bn outsourcing contract, Linda Carmichael was suspended.

Carillion was the "preferred bidder" for the contract and was up against, among others, the grisly tax avoidance experts, Mapeley (*Eyes passim*). The letter alleged that information had been withheld from council members and other bidders so as to favour Carillion – in effect, that the bid was slewed in favour of the outsourcing giant. The council, which has already spent hundreds of thousands of pounds on the fiasco, will now be unable to make a decision about outsourcing for weeks, maybe months.

A Bradford council spokesperson told the *Eye*: "The internal investigation is still ongoing and we are keeping the audit commission informed. The suspension is part of our normal procedure to protect the officer and allow a full and proper investigation to take place. Members have not met yet to make a decision on the contract." The *Eye* was unable to contact Ms Carmichael for comment.

GLASTONBURY TORY

MANY are those who hold mystical Glastonbury in Somerset sacred – druids, crusties, Christians, new-agers... and nimbys.

Their beliefs may differ, but none of Glasto's tribes were keen on local Tory councillor Edward James's application to build five houses in his garden, which backs on to Wearyall Hill, a place of pilgrimage where Joseph of Arimathea is said to have pushed his staff into the ground – a spot marked by the Holy Thorn Bush which has grown there for centuries (well, since the 1950s, anyway). Any building would upset the sacred vibes, said the druids. It will affect our house prices, said the nimbys.

Cllr James told the local paper that he had made the application because "as I get older a large garden is increasingly difficult to maintain". This puzzled locals, who observed that Mr James had been attempting to gain planning permission since 1985, when he was in his sprightly forties. He then declared that he "did not want the land to be mismanaged and overdeveloped" after his death – presumably because he wanted to do that himself, while he was alive.

When the 1985 application for six houses was thrown out, a county architect's report advised that the site could take no more than "one or two" dwellings, but overall it was "considered unsuitable for further development".

Nothing much changed in the intervening 20 years, other than that Edward James became a Conservative member of Mendip district council. Until recently he was mayor of Glastonbury. When the application reached the council's planning committee, 11 out of 16 members present, including chairman Nigel Woollcombe-Adams, declared that they were friends or political colleagues of the applicant. The chairman, however, ruled that they should still be allowed to vote, which they duly did, passing the application overwhelmingly.

TOPSY-TURVY BEDS

BACK in June *Eye* 1134 told how Tory Bedfordshire county council (BCC) was regretting having signed a £267m contract to outsource administrative services to Hyder Business Services (HBS – formerly Welsh Water).

Last month councillors resolved to ditch the 12-year contract at the end of August after learning that promised improvements had not materialised.

With eight years of the contract still to run, there arises the question of who is to blame and who must pick up the bill for the shambles. Both BCC and HBS are terrified that staff may unwittingly say or do something which could be used by m'learned friends to show that one party was more responsible for the collapse than the other.

So poisonous has the atmosphere become that staff on both sides have received written instructions from their employers detailing how they should behave toward one another. Both have been given crib sheets suggesting how any "tricky" questions should be answered.

So HBS's Bedfordshire Partnership director Phil Ladmore tells staff "not to make any comments on BCC, any actions taken by BCC or on the history of the Partnership" but instead to employ wooden stock phrases such as "The success of this depends on BCC's cooperation"... "You will have to put that in writing" and "I'm not in a position to give an opinion on that matter". Meanwhile BCC staff have received a similar parrot's guide on how to talk to their HBS colleagues: "That is matter for HBS's judgement"... "You must put that in writing to BCC"... "I'll consider it after I've seen it writing (and taken advice)"... "I'm not the person in BCC to talk about that".

This is all the more absurd because, when HBS does depart at the end of the month, most of the 550 staff it employed will be returning to their old jobs... at Bedfordshire county council!

Bomb-balls

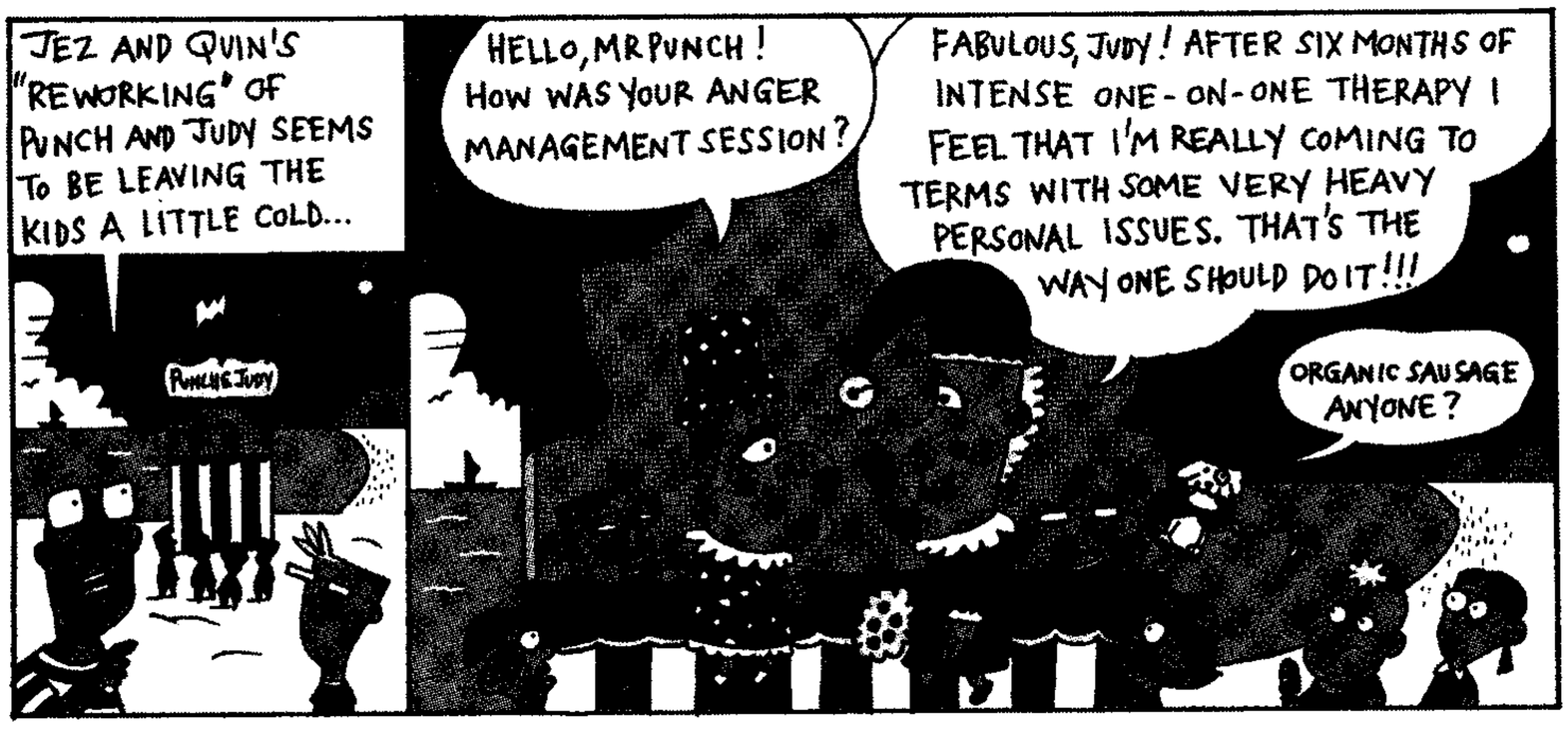
"I BELIEVE in London. I know there has been a tremendous cost for supporting my country's war on terror, which is now truly a world war on terror, and I appreciate it. Regardless of what you feel about it, it's going on and I really appreciate the support. In my own tiny way I'm paying that back." – **Rob Lowe on his West End appearance in *A Few Good Men*.**

"HOW can music respond to something as devastating as the London bombings? It is a question that has been weighing on my mind. Somehow, without quite intending it, I have stumbled towards a response of my own... I bashed it out in rough form on an acoustic guitar to my friend Bono one night and he became very animated. 'This is a song that needs be heard now,' he insisted." – ***Daily Telegraph* rock critic Neil McCormick on how he came to write and record the song "People I Don't Know Are Trying to Kill Me".**

"WHAT a month it's been! On 2 July we enjoyed Live 8 in Hyde Park... Then on the 6th the International Olympic Committee announced that London would host the 2012 Olympic games... Tragedy struck on the 7th with the horrific bombing of innocent people in London... And then on the 8th, incredibly the G8 world leaders actually agreed to do something about the debt in Africa with a $50 billion aid package. And we're not even halfway through the month yet! Why not try for some of our great prizes this month, you could be remembering July 2005 as the time you won a MyOffers prize." – **Email circular from Tiscali.**

"ON the evening of 7 July, I was lucky to find myself at the Jivamukti Yoga Centre in London. It was important on such a day to find a space in one's heart and share that space with others... the space without limits – a space that is common to all of us." – **Sting, cunningly combining his reaction to the attacks with a plug for a new yoga centre which just happened to open that very week.**

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER


JEZ AND QUIN'S "REWORKING" OF PUNCH AND JUDY SEEMS TO BE LEAVING THE KIDS A LITTLE COLD...
PUNCH AND JUDY
HELLO, MR PUNCH! HOW WAS YOUR ANGER MANAGEMENT SESSION?
FABULOUS, JUDY! AFTER SIX MONTHS OF INTENSE ONE-ON-ONE THERAPY I FEEL THAT I'M REALLY COMING TO TERMS WITH SOME VERY HEAVY PERSONAL ISSUES. THAT'S THE WAY ONE SHOULD DO IT!!!
ORGANIC SAUSAGE ANYONE?

NOOKS and CORNERS

Levelling the playing fields

GRANADA LEARNING, which is backing the £30m North Liverpool Academy, insists that the new school *will* be built on the Dixie Dean Memorial Playing Field in time for pupils to take up residence in January 2007, despite an attempt by locals to have the area declared a "village green".

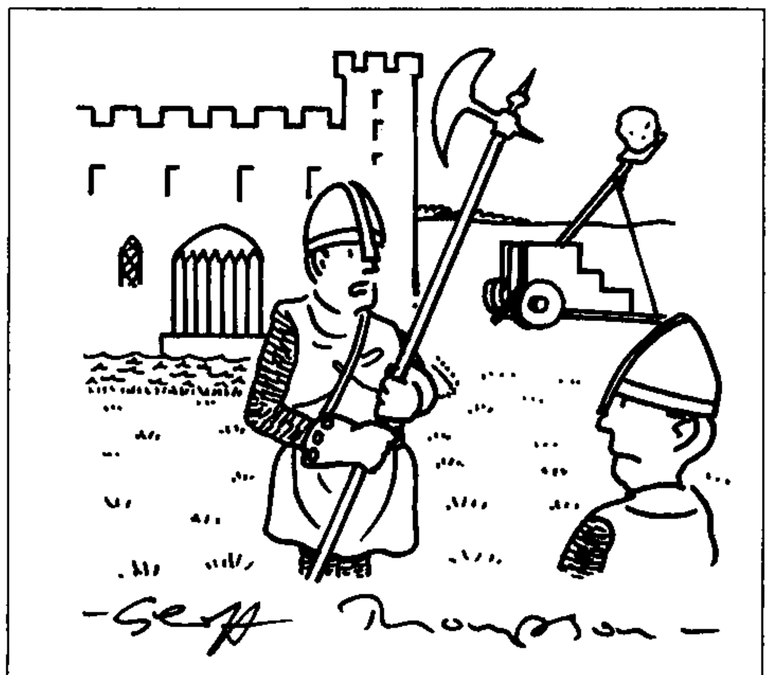
The 1,600-pupil school would be one of the biggest in the country, combining Anfield and Breckfield high schools. Delays to the funding agreement between the sponsors and the department for education have given Anfield residents time to launch a legal challenge to have the playing fields declared development proof. The fields, named after the Everton and England player of the 1920s and 30s, are used by numerous amateur football teams and local youngsters.

Meanwhile at Calderstones Park in the south of the city, the council plans Eden Project-style dome greenhouses to house the city's botanical collection. The largest of the three hemispheres is to cover 8,000 square feet. With the city excitedly predicting 100,000 visitors a year, more car parking will also be needed. No one denies that the collection (which has been in temporary storage in dilapidated greenhouse for years) should be on proper public display. But why in the middle of a park where plants are already enjoyed in the open air for no charge? Cornwall's Eden Project was at least built on a brownfield site. To meet the £12.5m cost of the new domes, the park's listed Georgian "big house" and a coach house will be flogged off to developers. An open air theatre at the back of the house will also be lost.

But that is not the only threat to Liverpool's beleaguered green spaces. Homes are being built on Chavasse Park near the city centre, and another "academy" school is going up in Newsham Park. Then there is poor Stanley Park in Anfield, which opened in 1870. Half of it has been given over to Liverpool FC, which wanted to move to larger premises. So a new 60,000-seater stadium, along with its attendant car parks etc, approved by John Prescott, will occupy the land.

Meanwhile sports minister Richard Caborn announced that the government was "starting to turn the tide on the playing field issue" with 72 new ones created last year. That figure is slightly less impressive once the 52 playing fields that were lost under developments in the same period are deducted, but a net gain is good news.

Sadly for already built-up areas like most of Liverpool, there's not much room for new playing fields once the old ones are gone.



"Bad news! It's a listed building"

Tunnel vision

ONE GENUINE, indeed unique, attraction that Liverpool does have is what is known as the Williamson Tunnels, the creation of Joseph Williamson, a successful tobacco merchant in the first three decades of the 19th century.

Williamson began by constructing vaults to support gardens and orchards behind his own house and others he had built in Mason Street. Then he went on and on, constructing and burrowing into the rock to create a network of tunnels under Edge Hill.

Williamson was very secretive about them, and their purpose remains mysterious. Possibly the tunnels were dug to relieve unemployment; but Williamson was very religious and they may have been a refuge from the coming Armageddon in those troubled millenarian times. Whichever, the tunnels are extraordinary and over the last decade volunteers belonging to the Friends of Williamson's Tunnels have been excavating them and clearing them out.

Now you might well think that Liverpool city council would recognise the tourist potential of these excavations and assist the Friends' project. But no. It initially approved plans for a seven-storey block of flats next to the tunnel entrance which would have destroyed the tunnels underneath (the Friends' opposition eventually reduced it to four storeys). Permission has also been given for more blocks of flats where houses once stood above the tunnels, while changes in the ownership of this development land is jeopardising the whole Williamson's Tunnels project – and the council is giving the Friends no help at all. I suppose authentic, historic holes in the ground, like old buildings, are not glamorous enough for a City of Culture.

'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

"They look to the Old Masters for inspiration, and their last show drew thousands of people."
TATE REJECTS £0·5M GIFT OF STUCKIST ART "IT DOESN'T DESERVE TO BE IN A NATIONAL COLLECTION" —SIR NICOLAS SEROTA
The Tate couldn't possibly show anything so wildly unconventional!
Well, exactly.

Lookalike

Ramsey

Alsop

Sir,

The resemblance between TV chef Gordon Ramsey and Marin Alsop, the controversially appointed musical director of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra (right), is striking. Chef d'orchestre, indeed.

ADAM WARD,

London SE1.

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

THE Performing Right Society (PRS) which collects royalties on behalf of Britain's composers has been congratulating itself on a record year in 2004. It handed out more money than ever (£256m); and, according to its press releases, everyone is dancing in the streets. Well, not everyone.

Many serious contemporary classical composers are sickened by what the PRS is doing with the money their music earns – not least because so little of it gets back into the contemporary classical world.

A few years ago the PRS controversially reorganised its allocation system in a way that favoured pop, rock and film composers (the ones who earn big money anyway) and disadvantaged the classical ones (who mostly struggle to survive). In answer to its critics, the PRS then set up the so-called PRS Foundation, designed to give out discretionary grants which, it was claimed, would ensure that classical composers were properly provided for.

But discretionary grants come at somebody's discretion – and the somebody in question doesn't seem very interested in classical music. The foundation's literature shows that most of its energies and funds are channelled into "refreshingly approachable and adventurous" projects involving rock bands, "techno and breakbeat events", "club night expenses" and electro-jam-happenings with names like Futuresonic, Celtronic and the Ether Festival, whatever that may be.

Dig around and you can find "contemporary classical" bursaries. But these are funded by the Bliss Trust (legacy of one-time master of the Queen's music, Sir Arthur Bliss) and only allow for payments of up to £500. The rock/techno/breakbeat handouts going to immortal artists like *I am the Mighty Jungulator* are worth up to £5,000.

The latest insult is the announcement of the foundation's first New Music Award: value £50,000. According to the literature, this award is open to "absolutely anybody"; but it's perfectly clear that classical composers need not apply. With a judging panel including a film composer, a stand-up comedian, someone from the Asian Dub Foundation, but no serious creative name at all, the recent shortlist included a piece of installation-art based on bells, an "electro-acoustic experience" at the Maritime Museum, Cornwall, and (the overall winner) a project for digging a hole in a field and filling it with bowls that catch persistent drips of water.

As the PRS is apparently proud to say, this £50,000 award (for a load of old tosh) is music's equivalent of the Turner Prize: a comparison that will not gladden many hearts among the hard-working, poorly-rewarded composers writing real music whose royalties have been creamed off to pay for it.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

MAN IN THE EYE

JOJAR DHINSA

WHO is Jojar "Joe" Dhinsa? According to the *Daily Mail*, he's the "charming self-made millionaire" who, says diarist Richard Kay, has been seen out with Eimear Montgomerie, estranged wife of golfer Colin.

The *Mail* was so excited by the news it ran a long profile of the 31-year-old businessman – and these are becoming a regular feature: the *Mail* had another gushing 1,500-word profile of Dhinsa only a year ago; and similar pieces have appeared in the *Express*, *Telegraph*, *News of the World* and *Evening Standard*.

All repeat the same titillating "facts", provided by the *Wunderkind* himself. He is worth £40m. He owns seven houses, including a mansion in Virginia Water, and no fewer than 19 cars including a Ferrari, an Aston Martin and a gold £250,000 Bentley.

But there are one or two discrepancies. In an interview last December he boasted of his "£2.2m, 10-bedroom mansion" in Virginia Water, yet now he invariably refers to it as a £4.5m mansion – a handsome appreciation over a mere six months. Even so, the general point is clear. He started with nothing – "the youngest son of illiterate Punjabi parents, who came penniless to Britain from India in the 1960s". And he has made a "monumental private fortune" from his private equity firm, the Athlone Group, which helps technology companies "meet their financial goals". Last year he even tried to take over Coventry City FC, claiming he'd inject as much money into the club as Roman Abramovich has at Chelsea.

Locating his wealth is none too easy, however. Records at Companies House show that the total income of Dhinsa's main company, Athlone International Ltd, was just £22,250 last year – and it posted a net profit of, er, £6,319. (Its 2005 return should have been filed by 11 March, but is overdue.) No accounts have ever been filed for other companies he claims to operate.

And what of the cars and houses? It's striking that no hack who has interviewed him has been permitted to see the famous £4.5m mansion. A former colleague who visited Dhinsa in Berkshire a couple of years ago found him living in a small semi in Reading, which Dhinsa admitted he had bought with a mortgage to the full value of the property. There was no sign of the fleet of luxury cars. But there was an impressive credit card which he liked flashing around, giving his title as "Lord Dhinsa".

Uncorroborated statements by Dhinsa need to be taken with a fistful of salt – a lesson Fleet Street seems unable to learn. Last April several newspapers faithfully reported his announcement that former Spice Girl Mel B was to be the face of Dhinsa's new hip-hop fashion label, Truth (sic). Dhinsa – who said he would soon be opening six Truth stores across London, employing 250 staff – had "held talks with the one-time Scary Spice and is close to securing a deal". Only the *FT* bothered to check. It found that Mel B had yet to be contacted, and no premises had been identified. They still haven't.

This was followed by his "bid" for Coventry City. He told the local paper he was willing to pay £100m for the Sky Blues, put up partly by him and partly by anonymous "Russian oil tycoons". Coventry chairman Mike McGinnity made a few simple checks and concluded that Dhinsa was all mouth and no chequebook.

"Joe Dhinsa's story is a parable of remorseless hard graft, rewarded by breathtaking riches," according to the *Mail*. "His greatest joy is making money and his aim is to be a billionaire at 40." No doubt he'll achieve it. All he has to do is announce on his 40th birthday that he's worth £1bn – and drooling hacks will duly report it as fact.

Letters

Private Eye

Cover story

Sir,

I've read Private Eye for 25 years, and have always tolerated your ageing public school humour and targets for the sake of the jokes and the political influence you've had.

Sadly your cover (1137) this time made me feel sick. I don't want to read it at all.

Kindly cancel my subscription.

Many thanks,
HEATHER PEACE,

London E17.

Right track

Sir,

Your "Thought for the Day" (Eye 1137) was perhaps a bit off-beam? Setting aside for the moment an inconsistency of which even the Mail would have been proud, I think you will find that those of us who stumped up the cash for the court hearing were much less concerned about the devaluation and subsequent theft of our shares; this was a golden opportunity to see an ex-secretary of state of the most deceitful and mendacious government of modern times having to account for his actions in open court and under oath.

I would happily have paid double for an opportunity like this. It is no wonder that the Times reported that the self-confessed liar, "Bozo" Byers, was "sweating and shaking" in the witness box, stripped as he was of the usual press officers, spin doctors and other flunkies to hide behind. How refreshing it was to see an ex-minister (and long may he remain so) actually having to **answer** *the questions put to him! Railtrack's QC performed a valuable service that the House of Commons and its cosy committees dispensed with long ago. It's called accountability.*

CLIVE GODDARD,

Crowborough, East Sussex.

Wrong track

Sir,

"Thought for the day" (1137) should read "Error for the day". The shares were purchased in two instalments of 190p, bringing the total cost per share to 380p. A slight discrepancy in your stated price.

Kind regards,
N. NOKES,

Whitley Bay.

Still railing

Sir,

In the previous issue (p3) you indicated that disgruntled Railtrack shareholders brought the current action against the government because they failed to get their money back. As I'm sure Dr B Ching will confirm, this interpretation oversimplifies the purpose of the action which is not about sour grapes.

Firstly, a significant number of Railtrack's private shareholders have charged the then government minister, Stephen Byers, with malfeasance. This is because they still can unlike the fewer but more powerful institutional shareholders who forfeited the right when they took the compensation deal mentioned. A deal, it should be noted, denied to the private shareholders whose loss the government felt didn't merit compensation. Secondly private shareholders feel that Byers was rather too hasty to declare Railtrack bankrupt ahead of the auditors, being a political rather than commercial decision. Patricia Hewitt also declared Rover bankrupt ahead of the auditors, but that is another story. Railtrack, unlike Rover, was haemorrhaging public money and the government had no confidence that continued cash injections were the answer. This of course is not the same as being bankrupt.

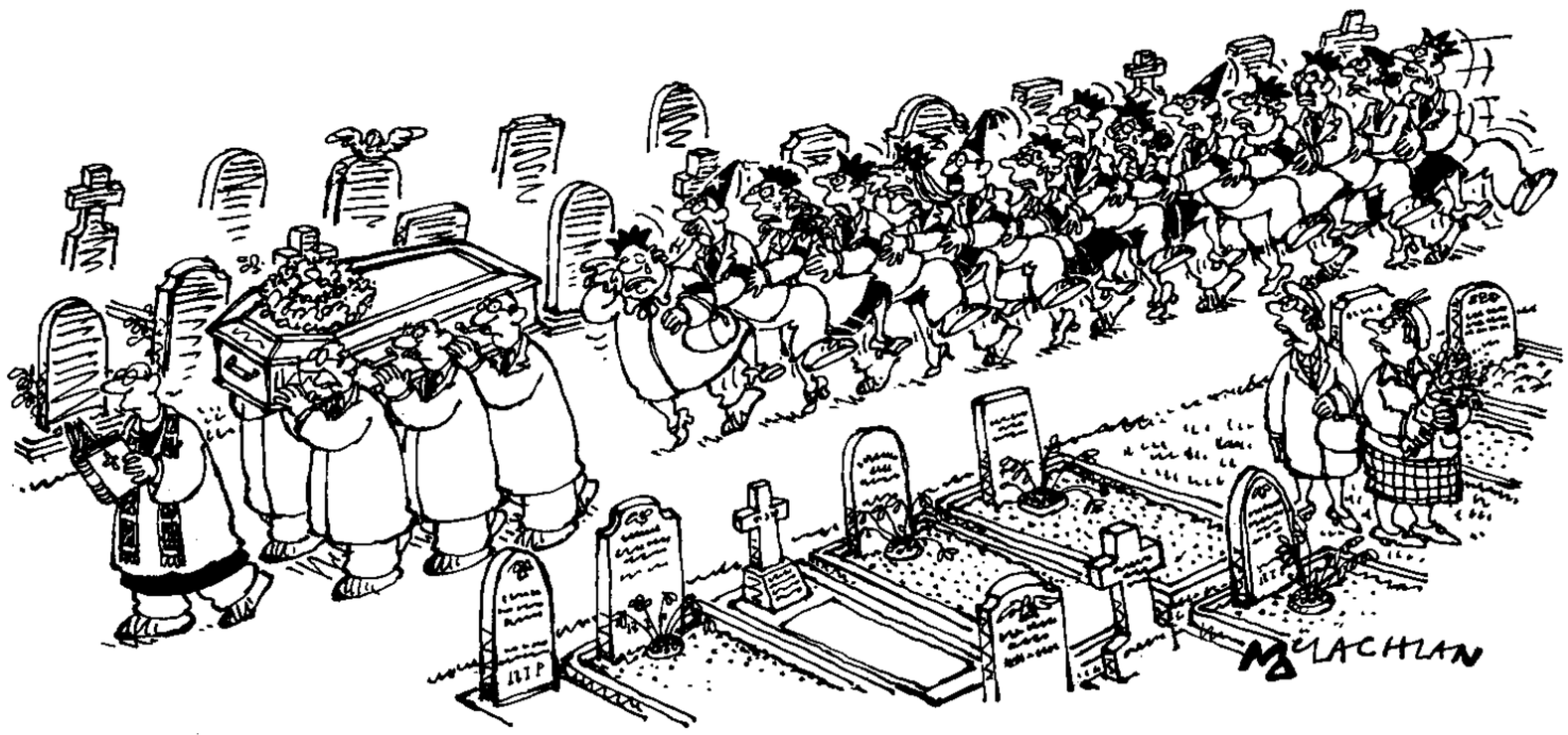
Thirdly the government knew that re-nationalisation was not an option. Easier to push the hapless company into receivership, replace it with a new company Network Rail, still nominally public limited to just one shareholder, the government. A clever move but not if Byers can be shown to have engineered the demise of Railtrack through being economical with the truth. This is where the claim of malfeasance comes in.

The case is a landmark one, not because of the number of private investors bringing the action, but because if malfeasance is proved the floodgates will open for claims from the institutional investors, whose previous settlement will be seen for what it was: a deal to buy silence.

The issue is really about government treating private shareholders with disdain, while buying off institutional investors who could cause it much greater embarrassment.

Faithfully,
GARRY HONEY,

Winchester.



"Apparently the deceased was a great party-giver"

Murdoch shilling

Sir,

I don't know what amazes me more... that you print an ad for Sky Television (shurely a Rupert Murdoch operation??) on page 35 or that they would give you the money when all good thinking subscribers like myself are, erm, already fully paid up subscribers.

Please ignore this email, it was sent by mishtake...

LEN HORRIDGE,

Via email.

Photo opportunity

Sir,

In these sad times when we are so rightly exhorted not to mistrust any section of the community on the basis of their racial origins etc, I wonder whether you have on file any photograph showing a prominent citizen displaying trust or indeed affection for a member of a different ethnic group?

Sincerely,
CHRISTOPHER WEBSTER,

Kista, Sweden.

In the pink

Sir,

You recently referred to an article in the Daily Telegraph relating to ITV's new marketing director Clare Salmon's pink Porsche. The car in question "often graced" the AA staff car park where Ms Salmon was previously marketing director replacing an equally subtle yellow Porsche. It was a Centrica bonus that paid for the car I'm afraid: I don't think she has been at ITV long enough to earn one!

Regards,
ANDREW WYTHES,

Via email.

"Great christening, vicar...See you in five years when we need to get him into the church school"

Bupa riposte

Sir,

Your article about the NHS working with the private sector (1136) contains some inaccuracies which require correction.

The new cancer unit at London's Charing Cross Hospital will be open to all private patients, not just BUPA members. It will be jointly funded by the NHS and BUPA Insurance. It brings greater choice to private patients in and around central London and the additional revenue earned by the hospital has the potential to deliver improved facilities and services for their NHS patients.

To keep premium increases for our customers as low as possible, we negotiate on their behalf for the best value healthcare at hospitals where they can receive treatment. BUPA's contract renewal discussions with St Anthony's Hospital in Surrey have been going on for more than six months. In April we wrote to our members who use the hospital advising them that, from July, some of them would only be able to use St Anthony's for out-patient treatment. In-patient treatment (including cardiac) would continue to be available at three alternative local private hospitals and numerous other hospitals in central London. None of these hospitals is owned by BUPA. St Anthony's has since reduced its charges and BUPA members can continue to receive treatment there as before.

Our concern is always for our insured members. There is no question that this was done to benefit anyone else, and certainly not to benefit our hospitals division. One in five BUPA-insured members uses a BUPA hospital when they need treatment, the majority of members receive treatment at other local private and NHS hospitals.

Yours faithfully,
DR NATALIE-JANE MACDONALD,

Medical and healthcare purchasing director, BUPA Insurance.

BLAIR CALLS FOR CLAM

Tony Blair has appealed for calm after the latest bomb attacks on London.

Sky News website

Colemanballs balls

Sir,

On p3 of PE 1137 you attribute the statement about a suicide bomber who has struck once being able to do it again to Mark Simpson. In Colemanballs, it was John Simpson who said it. If you're so short of jokes that they have to be recycled twice in one issue, at least can we have the sources consistent, please?

Luvya-just-the-same, as always,
MICHAEL GROSVENOR MYER,

Cambridge.

** Er... yes. It was* **Mark** *Simpson who said it and we should only have run it once. Ed.*

SOLUTIONS

"Integrated Solutions: Oiling the Wheels of Industry with the Knowledge to Care for the Environment" – *consultants*

"Inspired Solutions Consultancy Limited: expert advice covering all aspects of the leisure retailing business" – *consultants*

"Intelligent Solutions: a complete IT solution, including hardware, networking and e-commerce" – *consultants*

"Inbound Solutions guarantee to take the pain away from all telephony and application-related aspects of your organisation" – *consultants*

"Adsoft Solutions: Are you in need of a solution that we haven't talked about? Perhaps one of our friendly and over qualified experts can help" – *consultants*

All submitted by readers

Ringing endorsement

Sir,

Thank you all for publicising the disgusting attempt by the authorities to capitalise on the great British public by using 0870 and 0845 numbers to access desperate information after a tragedy. The Home Office has this time issued a standard phone line number to get information on the Sharm El Sheik bombings.

If you shout loud enough and often enough...

KEITH HALLAM,

Blackpool.

To infinitive and beyond

Sir,

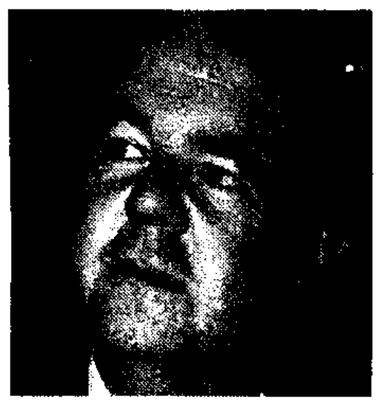
Does your Literary Reviewer read the books he refers to? He obviously hasn't read Eats, Shoots and Leaves, which he calls a "guide to grammar", and berates The Bookseller for using a split infinitive in referring to it (1137). It's actually a guide to punctuation and doesn't concern itself with split infinitives at all. Incidentally those "guides to grammar" that do, from Fowler onwards, are quite happy that split infinitives be used: Fowler calls writers who avoid split infinitives "bogy-haunted creatures".

Yours,
KEN STRONG,

Hornchurch, Essex.

Lookalike

Ian Hislop



Suicidal plantiff

Sir,

Have you noticed the resemblance between the suicidal jumper, saved by Mr Incredible in the movie "The Incredibles", and your very own morose Ian Hislop? After getting scooped up mid-plummet, the ingrate sues his rescuer which results in a wave of copycat litigation. Do you know of any other larger than life character that might have benefited from such a mid-air rescue but would have then probably sued his saviour?

CHRIS WOLFE,

Middlesex.

Duty officer

Sir,

R.W.T. Wood (1137) couldn't have been a regular reader of "Police Review" or "The JOB" during the 1990s. Otherwise he would surely have known of my one man campaign to control police sick leave not only in the Met but nationwide.

Perhaps a straight line graph showing the Met's escalating sick leave during the 1990s would vindicate my concerns once and for all.

Sincerely yours,
JOHN KENNY,

Via email.

"Here's a good one, stitching footballs in India"

Spart spot

Sir,

Who's getting paranoid? (Letters, 1136)? Special Branch **has** *databases on all who fail to toe the capitalist line; if not why on every protest march, demonstration or quiet little Green Party gathering has his colleague found it fit to video or gather vehicle registration numbers of those attending? When the PC Knackers are questioned re the car registration gathering, the answer was "in case of theft"! Yea right! This happens at gymkhanas, car boot sales or Conservative party BBQs? No way!*

Also for PC Knacker's information, the sister-in-law of a good friend of mine, him a supporter of Greenpeace, failed to get into the Women's Royal Airforce after being quizzed by the panel on her brother's activities in Greenpeace! Where, PC Knacker, do you think they got that information? Also how is it that unemployed and ex-union members fail to obtain employment?

This country is only one step away from a fascist state as witness the police activities during the miners' strike and more recently the demonstration and protests in Scotland at the G8 summit.

Yours faithfully,
ILLEGIBLE
PP MIKE SPART!

Address can be obtained from Special Branch files!

Camera shy?

Sir,

In Books & Bookmen (1137) you say that it seems irresponsible for the AA to feature the locations of speed cameras in their latest Road Atlas. Since drivers will slow down when they know they are in the vicinity of speed cameras, the safety objective is achieved. The AA, therefore, are acting in the interest of road safety.

The alternative would be to keep all speed camera locations secret in the hope of "catching" speeding motorists. Extending this logic would mean that the authorities "hope" there are some speeding motorists to catch – surely more dangerous?

I realize the simple answer is for everyone to drive safely, but if cameras are to be used, they should be to prevent speeding in the first place – so why not highlight their presence?

Yours faithfully,
LEON TRUSCOTT,

Via email.

Demolition man

Sir,

Re Nooks & Corners (1136). It is surely no coincidence that Prescott's demolition plans are known as Pathfinder, the same name adopted by Bomber Command for the forward squadrons of the RAF marking Hamburg, Dresden, Kassel etc for comprehensive destruction?

Yours,
MIKE HUGHES,

Berks.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"The sun is getting longer and the days are getting shorter."
SIMON BATES, ClassicFM
(Jonathan Partington)

"This is his first time back at the new stadium."
TOSH McKINLAY, Celtic TV
(Paul Cullen)

"The door is now open for him [Tiger Woods] to really kick it in..."
JOHN INVERDALE, Radio 5 Live
(Stuart Taylor)

"The offside flag went up immediately if not before."
JONATHAN PARK, BBC Radio Cambridgeshire
(Toby Wood)

"That's putting the horse in the stable after it's left."
GEOFF BOYCOTT, Channel 4
(Nigel Ogilvie)

Scenes You Seldom See

"Don't take care. Do something really stupid. Bye"

Making Glastonbury history

Sir,

Easy on the apologies in response to Karl Minns's letter (1137), especially those directed towards the Guardian. Although Chas 'n' Dave may have taken time to "make poverty history" in their chirpy corner of the Glastonbury Festival, over in the Guardian Lounge, the paper's very own mini-stage, nothing of the sort was going on. At 4.00pm on the Saturday, rather than raising our joined hands in the air, we were chugging down frappuccinos, munching on paninis and enjoying a performance by winsome Icelandic songstress, Emiliana Torrini.

So all very Grauniad apart from the white band thing. Perhaps this is why poverty stubbornly refused to become history?

Consequently I think it would be rash to deny your man the delights of that delicious perry.

Yours,
ROBERT ALLEN,

London NW3.

Perry interesting

Sir,

There is no such thing as "pear cider"! The similar (and just as vicious) drink made with pears is Perry. I've never been to Glastonbury, so if "pear cider" is being sold, it's probably to explain the drink to townies and other assorted thickies who usually drink foreign lager. I hope they're warned that it's difficult to look cool if your legs don't work!

ANNE DAVIS,

Tewkesbury, Glos.

Anthony Larkin, 30, was waiting on the platform when he saw a man in a black bomber jacket and jeans running towards him being chased by the officers. *The Times*

On the warpath

Sir,

XPYDA is correct in issue 1137 about the tonsorial styles of the Mohawks and Hurons but wrong about who wiped out who. The Hurons, also known as Wyandots, were almost eliminated by the Mohawks and their fellow Iroquois tribes in 1649, although some Huron refugees went south to become Iroquois themselves.

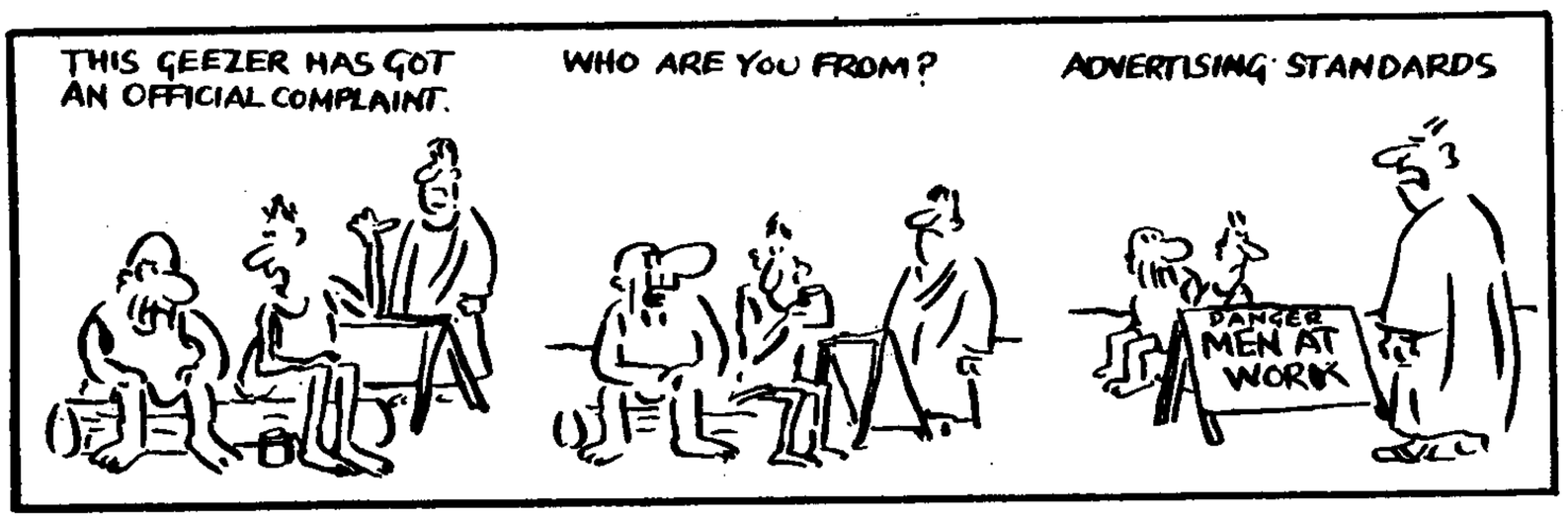
Yes, I know: I should get out on the warpath more often. More power to your tomahawk.

NIGEL HUNTER,

Via email.

HOM SAP

AUSTIN



Letter from **Libya**

from Our Own Correspondent

OURS is a land of paradox and inconsistency. The "leader of the revolution", the once dashing, now ageing Colonel Qaddafi, increasingly has the facial features of a pantomime dame. He further adds to his comedy credentials with a reputation for flatulence – especially if the odd western journalist makes it into his tent.

It's less amusing for us when the old boy insists his Swiss-domiciled son must play for the national football team, or he becomes his own personal pools panel. Indeed, his order to change the result of a recent local match from defeat to victory for his team prompted riots.

Nor is our opening up to the world going as smoothly as the stewards of the now creaking 36-year revolution might have wished. Our young people get their news from al Jazeera and their entertainment from Beirut-based pop channels. They know what's going on and they don't like it: mobile phones, for example, are more expensive here than just about anywhere.

There is a monopoly network (prop: Qaddafi jr) and more competitive foreign rivals are kept out. Angry youth is just one problem. Tribal clans in Benghazi and Tobruk are unhappy. The loyalty of the Berbers away from the coast is also uncertain.

There are three ways the colonel could deal with such challenges. He could let someone outside his family have a look-in when it comes to how we are governed. But that's not part of the revolution, nor is it ever likely to be: there is the ever-present *Mukharabhat* – or secret police – to keep things quiet. They certainly are no joke. But the easiest option is to buy a bit of peace and quiet. For life in the Great Jamahariya may be unfair, but it is not hard. Petrol is 16p a litre, schooling, health and housing are free and income tax is 2 percent. Since his leading role in the unscheduled departure of bon viveur King Idriss in 1969, the colonel has presided over the transformation of a largely nomadic, desert economy, whose only export was scrap metal from Second World War battlefields, to an oil-rich, urban – and courtesy of Qaddafi's "Man Made River Project" – food-sufficient regional power of 8m people. The "Man Made River" sucks water from aquifers deep under the Sahara and pipes it to farming projects on the coast.

Now there is even more money rolling-in. A heartfelt apology for the Lockerbie bombing, an end to the whispering about who really was involved, and sanctions are gone, allowing our oil industry a new lease of life. European – and American companies, especially – are falling over themselves to invest. We welcome them all.

Nor is it just money. No one likes to be bombed, obviously, and the colonel still bears the odd grudge for what British-based US planes did in 1984. But when it comes to the war on terror, Qaddafi is very much on message. He's had to deal with al Qaeda-motivated insurgents in recent years, and has helped secularist friends in Algeria and Tunisia do the same. So it was hardly Tony Blair and Jack Straw, with their quiet diplomacy, that helped open up our WMD laboratories. We have no reason to pick a fight with America just now.

With the west's eyes turned elsewhere, and our local problems under control, our leader can return to one of his more favourite hobbies: interfering in the affairs of other countries in the region. He regularly entertains African kleptocrats and aspiring rebel leaders, who turn up in Tripoli with empty suitcases and leave with them bulging. Of late Qaddafi has sought to act as peacemaker with Sudanese factions in Darfur, inviting the warring groups to spend time in expensive hotels in our capital. Such was his famed generosity that he opened our borders to thousands of refugees fleeing the fighting in Sudan, who promptly settled in Tripoli's ancient Medina and made it a no-go area. Such is our leader's unpredictable nature, he promptly changed his mind and sent them all packing.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "Burning books is an old American tradition," Pastor Scott Breedlove told reporters outside the Jesus Church in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. "It's part of our heritage. For centuries, Christians have been making bonfires out of books and magazines that offend the sight of God, and nowadays that list doesn't stop with printed material. There are also videos, DVDs, CD-ROMs, and provocative clothing that displease our Lord, as well as books. So why won't the city officials let us have a fire permit, so we can make a mighty conflagration of sinfulness outside our church?"

But Brad Brenneman (the district fire chief for Linn County) was resolute. "It's not a question of religious persecution. We simply don't want a situation where people are burning rubbish as a recreational fire. When we told Pastor Breedlove we wouldn't grant him a permit to start a fire outside the Jesus Church, he said that we ought at least to allow him to build a bonfire outside city limits. But that's not acceptable either, because county air pollution rules ban hauling material outside the city to burn it."

Pastor Breedlove complained that "in the end, they suggested we could use a shredder to destroy the offending material, but that didn't seem biblical enough to me. So we've decided to dump the books, videos, CD-ROMs and clothing into trash cans instead, and light candles on top of the lids. Candles don't need a fire permit, and at least this will be a symbolic act of burning." *(KWWL News [Iowa]. Spotter: David Jeffery)*

– ● –

● *"When the claims started pouring in, we suspected fraud," Chuck Strutt of the Powerball Multi-State Lottery told reporters in Tennessee, "because they were all getting the same five out of six numbers right: 22, 28, 32, 33, and 39, entitling each of them to $500,000. How could 110 players from 29 states all become second-prize winners in exactly the same way, when statistically there should only have been four or five? We didn't get a lot of sleep that night, I can tell you. Someone was obviously trying to cheat the system.*

"Over the next few days, we looked at everything to do with human behaviour to try and find an explanation. But none of the newspaper lottery forecast columns had printed those numbers. And although there was a winning ticket in a recent episode of the soap opera 'The Young and the Restless,' that didn't match either. But when the winners started arriving at our offices to collect their prizes, we finally found out what had happened. They'd all eaten in Chinese restaurants, all over America, and had all chosen their numbers from a fortune cookie. And all those cookies came from the same factory, Wonton Food in Long Island City."

Derek Wong of Wonton Foods later admitted that "we make four million fortune cookies each day, and sell them to restaurants all over the country, but we don't change the numbers very often. It's nice that 110 people won the lottery because of our cookies, but from now on we've been told to use a computer to make sure that the numbers are random because it will be more efficient." (Kansas City Star, 12/5/05. Spotter: Alistair Fairweather)

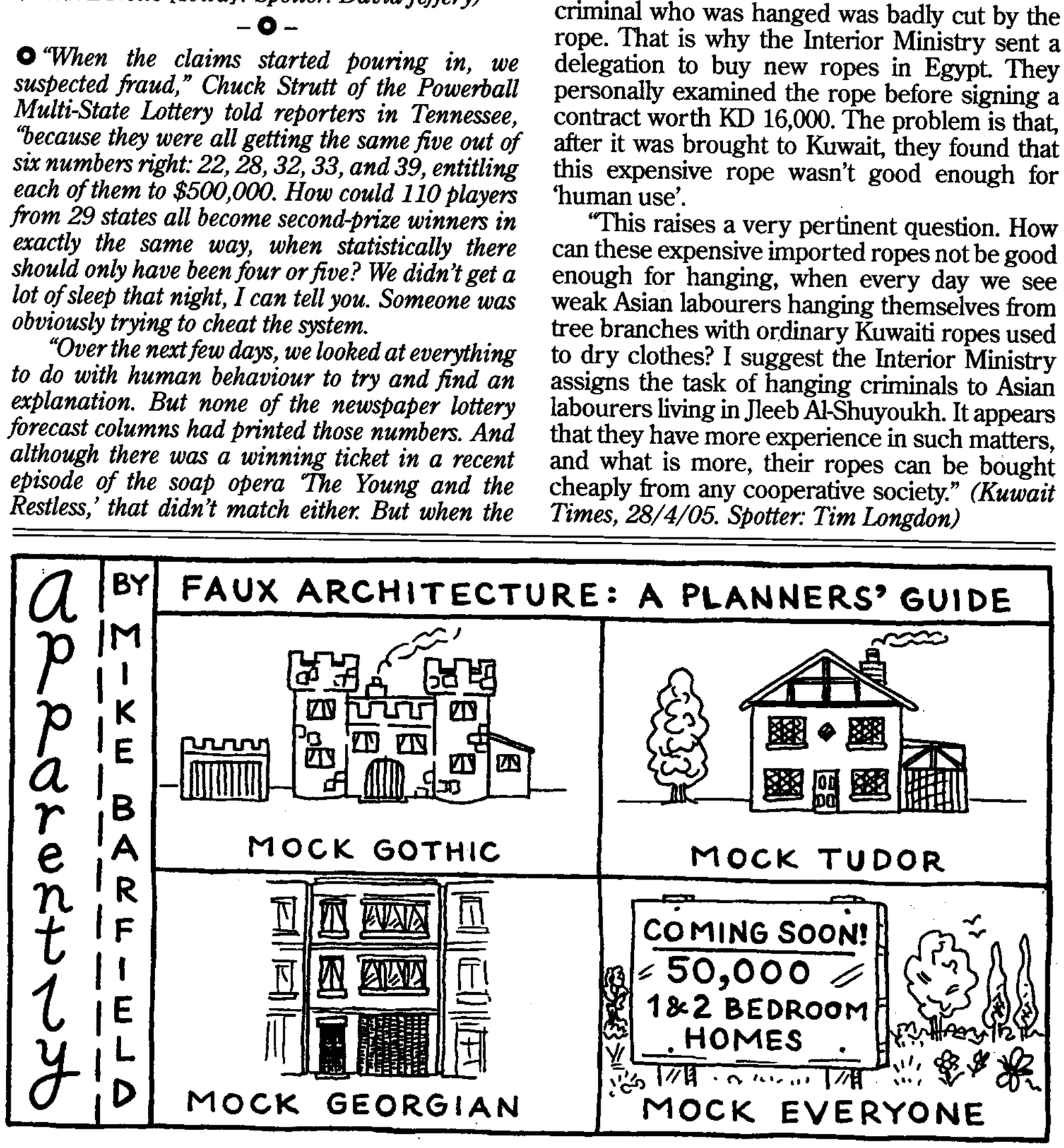
– ● –

● "Why is our government trying to create problems out of nothing?" former oil minister Ali Ahmad Al-Baghli asked his readers in Kuwait. "The Interior Ministry, which is responsible for implementing death sentences by hanging, recently started importing ropes for this purpose from Egypt, after England stopped manufacturing them. The rope is specially made for hanging, and not only the executioners, but also the men who tie the rope around the neck of the condemned man, are carefully trained for the job.

"Three months ago, when the last public hanging was held in Kuwait, the neck of the

criminal who was hanged was badly cut by the rope. That is why the Interior Ministry sent a delegation to buy new ropes in Egypt. They personally examined the rope before signing a contract worth KD 16,000. The problem is that, after it was brought to Kuwait, they found that this expensive rope wasn't good enough for 'human use'.

"This raises a very pertinent question. How can these expensive imported ropes not be good enough for hanging, when every day we see weak Asian labourers hanging themselves from tree branches with ordinary Kuwaiti ropes used to dry clothes? I suggest the Interior Ministry assigns the task of hanging criminals to Asian labourers living in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh. It appears that they have more experience in such matters, and what is more, their ropes can be bought cheaply from any cooperative society." *(Kuwait Times, 28/4/05. Spotter: Tim Longdon)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo,

And I think we've all been very much reminded this week that we are all of us living in a very different world from the one we were living in last week!

A world in which the old certainties have been suddenly swept away. And, hey, there's nothing wrong with sweeping away old certainties!

That's what we do with ideas which have passed their sell-by date!

How can we get new certainties in this life unless we've had the courage to get rid of all those old certainties which are no longer relevant to the world we're living in! Which, as I've already said, is very different from the one we were all living in an hour ago!

So one thing I am certain about is that we've got to junk all that dated old nonsense about "civil liberties" and "habeas corpus" and "Magna Carta". Hey, who speaks Latin anymore? It's the 21st century isn't it, and…

...Excuse me, Tony, but I demand my basic human right to interrupt this newsletter in order to point out that most of what you have already said is utter nonsense and the very opposite of what people like us should stand for [*writes Cherie Booth QC in a personal capacity as a senior barrister-at-law and spokesperson for the human rights community*]. **What my husband has totally failed to grasp (along with such little matters as how to use the washing machine, the iron and the video!) is that, once you take away people's human rights you become just as bad as the people who are trying to take away your life.**

As I said in my private speech to 3,000 lawyers in Malaysia (which I wish to emphasise I was only visiting in my private capacity as the vicar's wife), if you are worried about your human rights, St Albion's is privileged to have some of the very top practitioners in this field in the whole world.

It would be wrong for me, in my private capacity, to name names, but the company I work for is internationally regarded as the best human rights practise in the world employing the wife of your vicar (and our telephone number can be found in the book under "M"!)

For example, if you want your daughter to go to the local primary school in a burka and her headmistress complains, then you should contact us to sue the school for a flagrant infringement of your daughter's human rights, and to demand a sum of damages not exceeding the school's budget for several years.

You will then be able to buy your daughter all the burkas she wants!

…I'm sorry, Cherie, but I've just got to step in at this point, to remind you that this is the newsletter and I am actually the vicar…

...be quiet, Tony, I'm making a very important point, not just waffling on in a well-meaning but totally pointless way, just because you don't know what to say because your good friend the Rev. Dubya hasn't rung you up recently to give you one of his little pep talks about the need for one of his mad crusades against the Evil One!

…Cherie, honestly, this really isn't very good timing. I mean, you know, there's quite a lot going on, and some of us are playing our socks off to, you know, try to find something helpful to say…

...if you'll just let me finish, Tony, I was making the rather important point that there are a lot of people who need help in these uncertain times, and it's my job to give them that help.

For example, imagine that you are the headmistress of our local primary school and that one of the girls turns up in a burka, in flagrant breach of the school rules and the headmistress's basic human right to run her own school in the way she thinks best.

Obviously you want to sue the girl and her parents for every penny they've got! And that's where we come in...

…honestly, Cherie, I really don't think that this is appropriate at this particular time, and I must therefore ask you…

...oh, so a woman's not allowed to say anything now, is that it?

Perhaps you'd like me to wear a burka and walk four paces behind you as if we were still living in the middle ages!

I tell you, you'll be hearing from myself, and I warn you that I'll be sueing you for every penny we've got! Which, incidentally, due to the miserable salary they pay you for being vicar, i.e a pathetic £166,000 a year, is not very much. Which is why I have to go on private speaking tours to places like bloody Malaysia, to keep up our payments on the mortgage...

…that's really below the belt, Cherie…

...oh, so it's my fault now, is it? I see!

…I didn't say that, Cherie…

...I'm not going to argue with you Tony. If you can't see how stupid and irrational you're being, then there's no point in my wasting my time. I'm leaving this newsletter right now.

…Well, I think that what that shows is that this is a parish where everyone is encouraged to speak their mind and they'll all be listened to, irrespective of whether they're talking complete nonsense or not!

And if even the vicar's wife stands a very good chance of being placed under house arrest by armed officers in St Albion's Neighbourhood Watch operating their shoot-to-kill policy then so be it!

As I said, it's a very different world from the one we were living in when I started this newsletter ten minutes ago!

Yours,

Tony

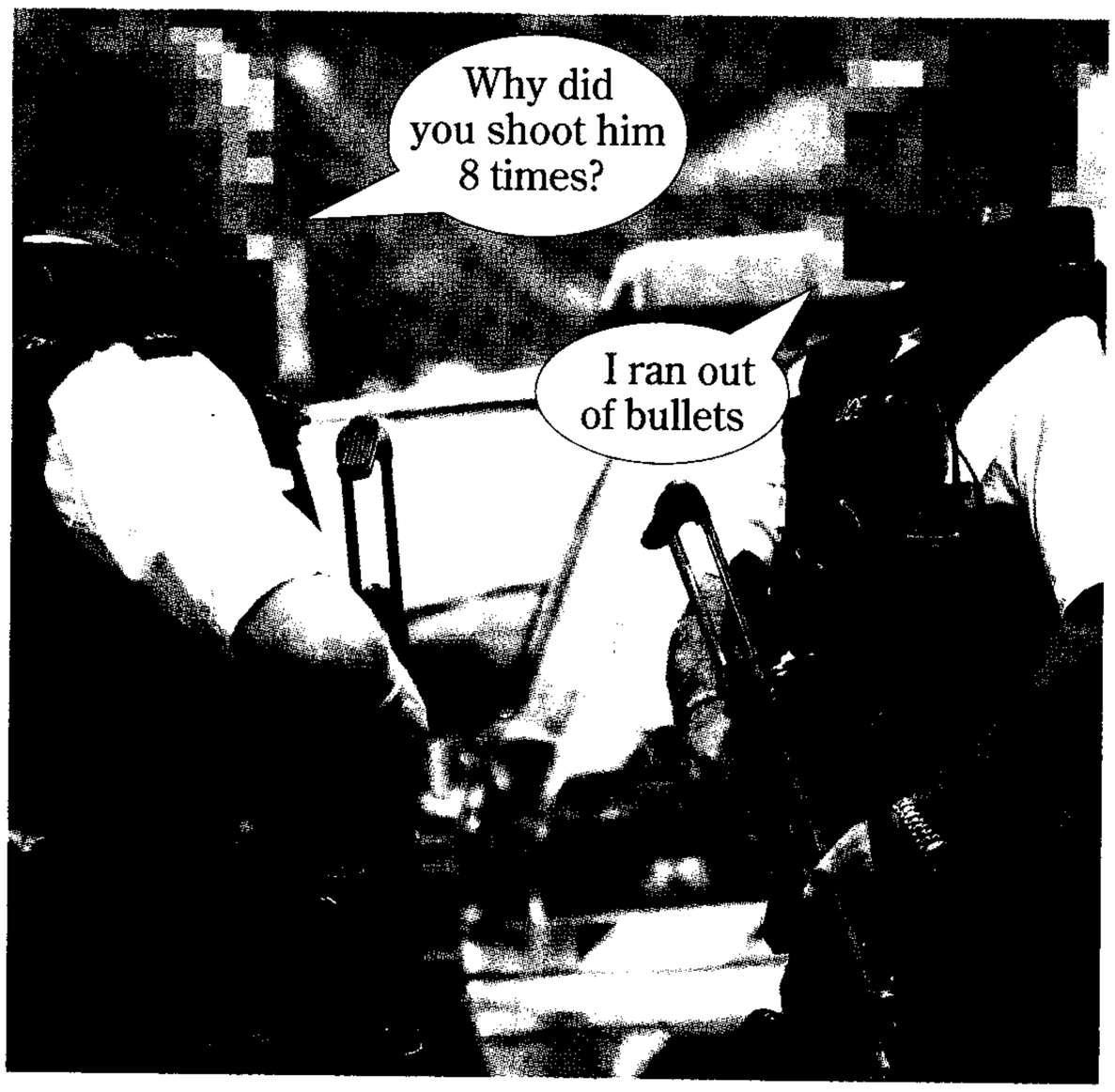
GOVERNMENT REINTRODUCES CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

by Our Political Staff **Lunchtime O'Noose**

IN A new crackdown on innocent men in the street, Home Secretary Charles Clarke last week ordered a return to capital punishment for anyone whom the police mistake for a terrorist.

"It is time these innocent people were taught a lesson," said Mr Clarke, who explained "capital punishment of course only applies to those shot in the capital, London".

Old jokes revisited



WAR ON TERROR DAY 94

■ THE WHITE House has confirmed that it will no longer be referring to the ongoing conflict in Iraq as the 'war on terror', saying the term had too many negative connotations.

"From now on we'll be referring to it as 'Desperate Housewives' ", said a White House spokesman, "as our market research has shown that this will make the ongoing instability in the country much less worrying to the American people."

"We're also considering changing George Bush to 'Bill Clinton' as that's also proving very popular."

HAVE YOU SEEN THESE MEN?

SPECIAL CCTV footage has been released today showing dangerous armed men who ran amok on the London underground killing innocent civilians and spreading terror throughout the capital.

Police were appealing to Londoners last night not to come forward and to say nothing at all in the hope that everyone will forget the whole thing.

"If you recognise any of these men", said a spokesman, "I would keep very quiet in case they shoot you."

HAVE YOU NOT SEEN THIS MAN?

HAS ANYONE in Britain not seen this man, known only as Sir Ian Blair, in the last 24 hours? He is rumoured to live permanently in a television studio somewhere in London but may occasionally make the odd journey to his office where he is thought to be the head of the Metropolitan Police.

According to intelligence sources he is a fanatical believer in himself and claims that "shoot-to-kill" is the only way for his followers to achieve their peaceful aims *(cont. p.94)*

Daily Mail

ENEMY IN OUR MIDST

by Our Award Winning Columnist **Phil Space**

ALL OF BRITAIN wakes up this morning knowing that we have a new and horrific enemy in our midst – a home-grown cancer that must be excised for any means possible.

I am speaking of course about the evil Cherie Blair, who perpetrated an atrocity of a speech when she defended terror suspects' civil liberties in Malaysia.

Revelations that Cherie has happily lived generously off the State in a home provided by the tax-payer for years makes her betrayal of Britain even more sickeningly repulsive.

And how does this woman repay Britain's generosity? By daring to suggest *(cont. p.94)*

MAIL COMMENT

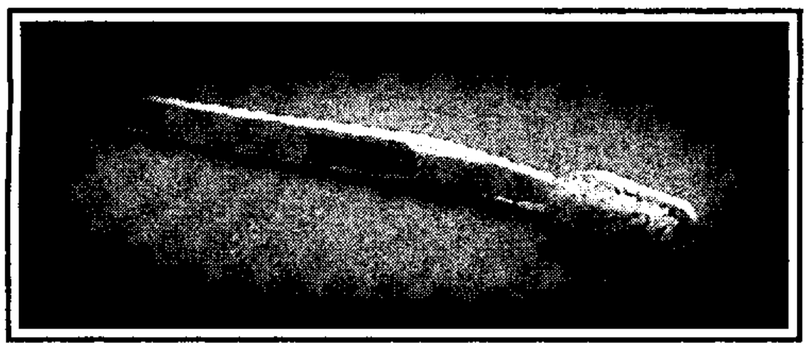
AS IF the current terror facing Britain wasn't bad enough, we now learn that two of last week's would-be suicide bombers were living on state benefits.

Wanting to blow us all to smithereens with their bombs is one thing.

But claiming state benefit is a far more serious matter.

Until such time as the police institute a policy of shoot to kill against all people known to be in possession of housing benefit forms, none of us can ever sleep soundly in our beds again.

IN THE SALEROOMS



TURD TOOTHBRUSH EXCEEDS £1M ESTIMATE

by Our Man In Bond Street **Lady Violet Bonham**

A TOOTHBRUSH, believed to have been used once by Mr Spiggy Topes, leader of the Turds, a popular singing group, was sold for a record £1.2 million at Sotheby's last night.

The 7in toothbrush, a white-handled bristle Gibbs X20, was the property of retired hotel porter Enoch Rankin, 72, who claimed that Mr Topes had left it behind after a one-night stay at the £15-a-night Excelsior Hotel, Abergavenny, in 1969.

Said Mr Rankin: "The Turds were playing a one-night stand at the Wintergarden Palace and left in a hurry the following morning after hearing police sirens in the street.

Denture Capital

"Following their departure, I noticed the toothbrush and I thought to myself, 'This will be worth a small fortune in years to come'."

Asked how he would spend the money, Mr Rankin said that he needed it to fit a new sink unit in his caravan.

● Turd Memorabilia: Full Report **94**

"I can never remember – do you pass the cocaine to the left or the right?"

RADIO FOUR

What You Switched Off

THE TODAY PROGRAMME

Radio 4 Announcer: And here is the news. The police are continuing their search for possible suspects in the terrorist bombing campaign.

Naughtie *(for it is he)*: As you've just heard, the police are continuing their search for possible suspects in the terrorist bombing campaign. Phil Airtime, you've got the latest on this police operation... what are you hearing?

Airtime: Well, Jim, the reports we're getting from the police suggest that they are continuing with their search for possible suspects, but obviously detailed information is scarce for security reasons.

Naughtie: So, what you're hearing from police sources is that detailed information is scarce. Is that for security reasons, Phil?

Airtime: That's right, Jim. Detailed information is scarce, but what we do know is that this operation is ongoing and we are assured that the search is continuing for possible suspects.

Naughtie: And do we know who these possible suspects are, Phil?

Airtime: The police are not saying a lot about it at this stage, but what I'm hearing from my own police sources is that they're not saying a lot about it at this stage.

Naughtie: Thank you, Jim. And at 7.58, the news headlines.

Newsreader *(B. Perkins)*: Police are continuing with the search for possible terrorist suspects. The BBC has learned that the identity of the suspects cannot be revealed for security reasons. Back now to James Naughtie.

Naughtie: It's 7.46 and time for Thought For The Day and the speaker today is the Imam Mohammed Rusbridger of the Frinton-on-Sea mosque.

Imam: You know, it's very easy, isn't it, to jump to conclusions, but you know the message of the Koran is that there's good and bad in all of us.

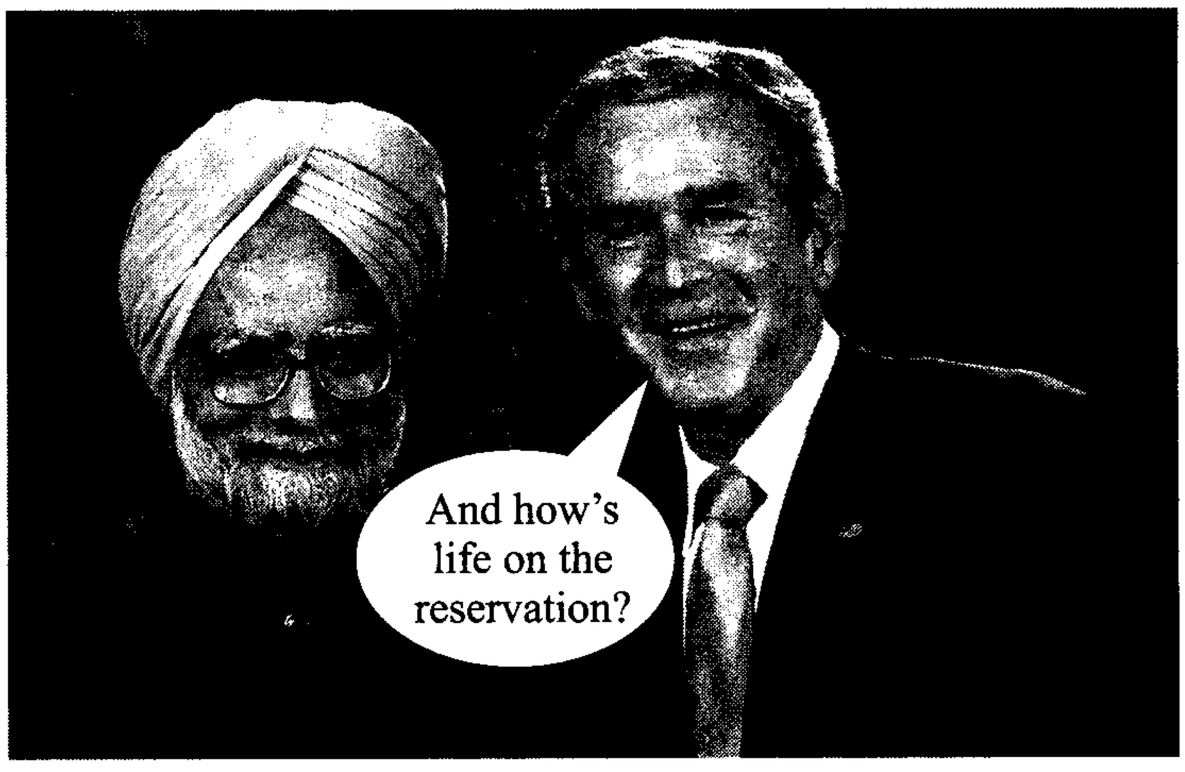
Naughtie: Thank you, Imam, and later in the programme we'll be bringing you the update on today's police operation as they *(cont. every day)*

BLAIR IN BOOK SHOCK

THE WORLD was rocked to its foundations when an updated biography of the Prime Minister, published this week, revealed shock new facts about the Iraq war.

Says the author, a man with a pipe, "I can exclusively reveal that Tony Blair was reluctant to stand up to President Bush in the run-up to the war. This will shock *(cont. p. 94)*

BUSH MEETS INDIAN LEADER



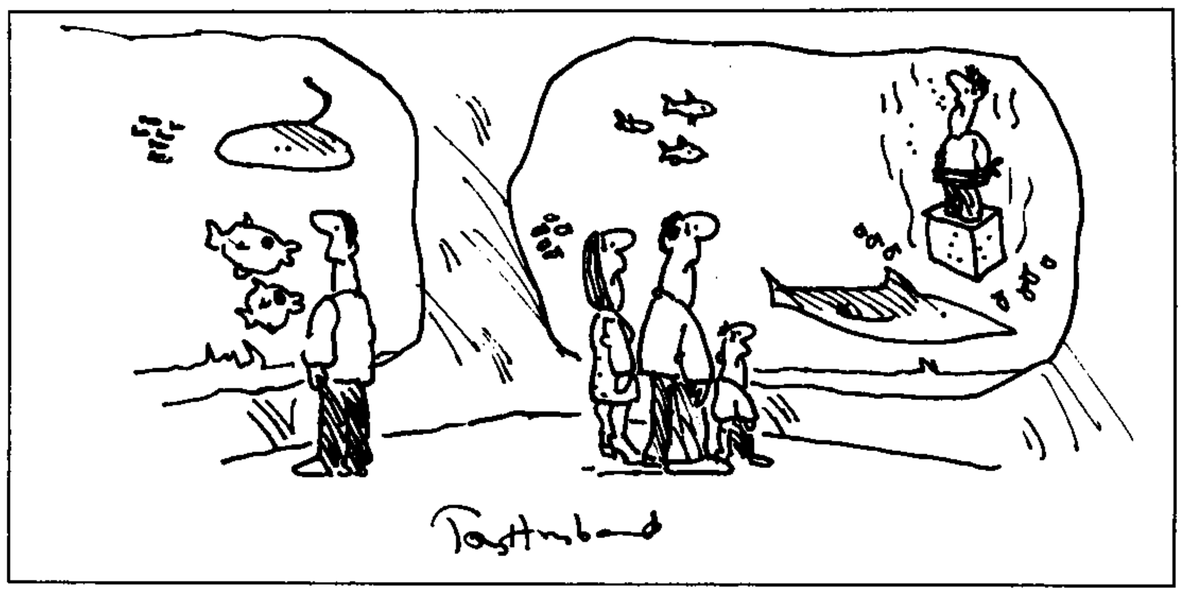
EXCLUSIVE TO ALL PAPERS

An Apology

IN RECENT minutes, we may have given the mistaken impression that the England cricket team were good at cricket. Headlines such as "Flint-off to stuff the Aussies", "Vaughan to be Wild" and "Harmin-son going to set on Aussie rule" may have led readers to believe that the fearless young England team were about to score an historic Ashes victory against a sadly ageing Australian team, one full of players now well past their prime, such as Ponting, McGrath and Warne.

We now realise, in light of Australia comprehensively defeating England in the first test at Lords, that nothing could be further from the truth, and that they are in fact rubbish. The pathetic capitulation of the likes of Flintoff, Vaughan and Harmison graphically illustrating the gulf that exists between this woefully inexperienced England line-up and a rampant Australian team, full of such proven champions at the peak of their form as Ponting, McGrath and Warne.

We apologise for any confusion, and any confusion in half an hour, when England have one good session on the first day of the second test, and we again salute the England team as being every bit as good if not better than this ageing Australian...etc...etc.



Water companies – that all-purpose warning in full

BRITAIN'S water companies have warned that the lack of rain/torrential downpours/light showers we're experiencing (DELETE AS APPLICABLE) mean that Britain is facing the very real prospect over the coming months of drastic water shortages/horrendous floods/cancelled barbecues (DELETE AS APPLICABLE) and that the prospect of hosepipe bans/villagers being whisked to safety from the roof of their submerged home/rained off test matches (DELETE AS APPLICABLE) this summer is highly likely.

This is because we are profiteering/incompetent/inept/badly managed/lazy. (DO NOT DELETE AS APPLICABLE)

The Alternative Rocky Horror Service Book

No. 94 A Service of Blessing for the Celibate Partnership of Same-Sex Ordinands

The President *(for it is he, or she)*: Brethren and sistren. We are gathered here today to celebrate the coming together...

Congregation: Oooh er missus!

President: Titter ye not *(© the estate of the late Sir Francis Howerd)*. As I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted, the coming together of M and M *(here he may say 'Rupert and Trevor', or it may be 'Jen and Fran')* in the state of holy concelibacy.

(The concelebrants will then step forward to the altar for the making of vows)

President: Do you, M and M, solemnly promise to live together with your partner, M or M, for as long as you are both happy with this lifestyle arrangement?

Concelebrants: We do.

President: Do you solemnly promise to have but not hold each other, until such time as your relationship ceases to be meaningful in a real sense?

Concelebrants: We'll do our best, but none of us is perfect.

President: And do you solemnly pledge that you will refrain from all manner of hanky-panky, rumpy-pumpy and any other act of diverse lewdity whatsoever?

Concelebrants: That's a big ask!

President: I now pronounce you vicar and chaste partner.

(Here the newly united will not exchange a kiss, as an outward and visible sign of their continence, one with another)

READING
(adapted from Corinthians 13)

"Faith, hope and chastity, there abideth these three, but the greatest of these is chastity."

(Here shall be sung a suitable piece of popular music, such as 'Tea For Two, Vicar' or 'Let's Not Spend The Night Together'. The congregation shall then recess to some suitable venue to toast the happy couple, as it may be with a cappuccino in Old Compton Street)

the PREMIERSH*TS
PAUL WOOLEY
WELL IT'S THE CURTAIN RAISER FOR THE NEW SEASON
THE COMMUNITY SHIELD?
NO...
"THE TABLOID BACK PAGES..."
BARTON FINED £120,000 FOR FIGHTING
DIOUF FINED FOR NOT HAVING A T.V. LICENCE
KEANE ROWS WITH FERGIE
MOANING MOURINHO: "I'VE GOT SO MUCH MONEY TO SPEND"
HOOLIGAN

WHAT YOU DIDN'T READ

EDUCATION Secretary Ruth Kelly has announced a 27 million pound initiative that would see children from poor backgrounds being taught to read and write in buildings called "schools".

"We believe that in the past 'schools' proved effective in giving these children the skills they needed in the outside world and, rather than just rely on their parents to teach them, we're willing to give them another try, said Kelly (*cont. p.94*)

That Heath Funeral Service In Full

Organ Voluntary
The Grocer Fugue
(Beethoven, arr. Heath)

Hymn
Morning Cloud Has Broken
(arr. Heath)

Reading
O Heath Where Is Thy Sting?
(Treaty of Romans, Ch.13)

Song
Three Days A Week
(Lennon/McCartney, arr. Heath)

The EUlogy will be delivered by the Bishop of Brussels, the Very Rev. Horace Sprout

Anthem
I Was Sailing
(Stewart, arr. Heath)

Address
Arundells, The Close, Salisbury.

Song
Signing In The Train
(Kelly, arr. Heath)

Dismissal by Baroness Thatcher

Order of service taken from the Book of Common Market Worship

"Just look what some sick bastard has gone and done... !"

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam James Doohan, better known as Chief Engineer Scott of *Star Trek* fame

So. Farewell then
"Scotty" – Chief
Engineer of the
USS Enterprise.

"Beam me up,
Scotty." That was
The catchphrase they
Used about you.

But now it
Is you who
Has been
Beamed up.

Captain E.J. Thribb
(Warp Factor 17½)

The Secret DIARY OF SIR JOHN MAJOR KG aged 63¾

Sunday

I was sitting at the breakfast table eating my Cinnamon-Flavoured Golden Grahams when my wife Norman came in with a very grave face and said that she had just heard on the BBC that the last great male Conservative prime minister had sadly passed away.

"What on earth are you talking about?" I asked, with no small measure of indignation. "Can't you see that the gentleman to whom you refer is sitting here in your own kitchen consuming a bowl of interestingly spiced breakfast cereal? Oh yes."

"Oh no, they don't mean you, John. I am talking about the great Sir Edward Heath, who was not only a world statesman but also a yachtsman of international repute who conducted many of the world's finest orchestras. Unlike some people," she added, looking at me in a not inconsiderably meaningful way, "whose main hobby appears to have been seeing Mrs Currie."

"What do you mean?" I replied. "I have drawn a line under that and moved on." And with that I retired to my 'Den' to compose the tribute to Mr Sir Edward Heath which I was going to dictate to the newspapers when they rang up. Sadly the phone must have been out of order that night.

Thursday

Today is in no small measure a very historic day. Along with many other world statesmen, such as Mr Hurd and the Chinese Ambassador, I went to Salisbury Cathedral for the funeral. It is a not inconsiderably large building with a spire which, in my judgement, could well be one of the highest I have ever seen. I made a decision to look this up in the Guinness Book of Records when I returned home.

The service was very well organised. The bit I liked most was when they carried in Mr Sir Edward's "Garter" on a special velvet cushion, showing how important it is to be a Knight of the Garter, which I am. Oh yes!

Not only did Sir Heath and I have being Knights of the Garter in common, we also both came from lowly origins but nevertheless rose on sheer merit to the very highest office in the land, unlike such privileged but unsuccessful figures as Mr Waldegrave, who may have gone to Eton but ended up carrying round the biscuits in our Cabinet meetings.

After the service was over, a handful of VIPs such as myself were invited to Mr Heath's lovely home which was so close to the church that they even had a sign up saying 'Close'.

When we arrived we were given a glass of champagne, served from a silver tray by a very pleasant young man, possibly of Filipino origin. "This is not in my judgement a wholly appropriate type of beverage for such a sombre occasion as this," I commented to an elderly woman in a black hat who had come in behind me.

"We are not, after all, celebrating Mr Heath's death," I went on.

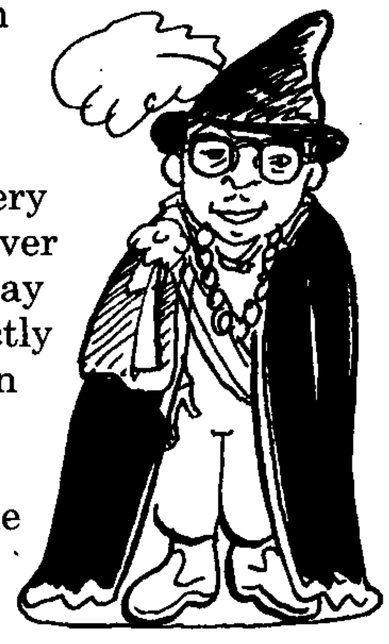
"Speak for yourself," she replied, in a familiar voice that left me in no doubt that she was none other than Mrs Baroness Thatcher, i.e. the woman whose name I never mention, oh no.

I was about to try to come up with a witty retort to put her in her place. But, emptying her glass of champagne in one not inconsiderable gulp, she interrupted me before I had been able to think of anything.

"Still," she said. "There was one good thing about Ted. At least he wasn't as bad as that silly little twit with glasses who followed me."

"That is no way to talk about William Hague," I replied, "who does not even wear glasses."

This exchange, in my view, confirmed what I had thought for a not inconsiderable period of time – namely that Mrs Lady Thatcher has become a very sad figure who has clearly lost her mind and should no longer be a Knightess of the Garter. Unlike myself, who is still very much in demand as a speaker in such prestigious venues as the famous Walmart Conference Centre in New Dworkin, Ohio, where next month I am to have the honour of speaking on the theme of "Maastricht and Beyond: A Historical Perspective by World Statesman The Rt. Hon. Sir John Major, Knight of the Garter". I am sure I will have a very big audience, whatever my brother Terry may say, with his distinctly unhelpful suggestion that I should take along some garden gnomes to put on the seats to make the place look full.



The Duchess of Hearts

by DAME SYLVIE KRIN, author of *La Dame Aux Camillas, Heir of Sorrows, Born To Be Queen Consort* and *Put Out More Fags.*

THE STORY SO FAR: Camilla and Charles have been married for a hundred glorious days.

Now read on...

"WHAT a perfect English day," thought Camilla, as the rain flooded down on the picturesque little Norfolk village of Bernard St Matthew.

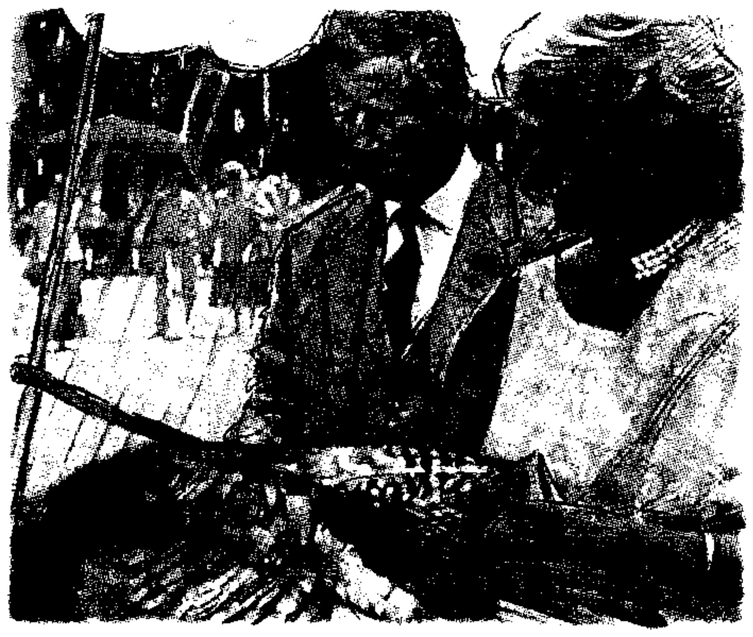
She and Charles were attending the village fete to raise money for one of Charles's many charities, Prayerbook Lovers Against Windfarms.

They had all said it would never happen – but how wrong they were!

Here she was, on Charles's arm, as he graciously tried to guess the weight of the prize locally-bred turkey on the table in front of them.

"Er, gosh, it's rather a big one, isn't it? Can I do it in pounds and ounces, or have I got to do it in those kilometre thingies?"

"Ha, ha, ha, Your Majesty!" the villagers all laughed as he prodded the enormous fowl with



his decorated walking stick, a gift from the Islamic Centre in Hackney.

Camilla bathed in the goodwill and affection that was being showered on them wherever they went.

"Three cheers for Charles and Camilla!" shouted one loyal old countryman, as he puffed his ancient clay pipe.

"I like *your* bird, sir!" ventured a cheeky youngster, dressed in traditional shellsuit and trainers.

Camilla blushed as she led the happy laughter. And she was even getting used to having her picture taken by those friendly photographers who followed them wherever they went.

Even as the thought crossed her mind, a group of them emerged from behind the bouncy castle.

"Camilla!" they chorused. "Give us a smile, darlin'. Show us yer wellies, luv!"

There was a time when Charles would have been irritated by such an intrusion, and by the media's obvious preference for pictures of his spouse rather than himself. Not, of course, out of any sense of vanity, Charles would have insisted to himself, but because he was, after all, you know, heir to the thingie, and therefore should be the centre of attention.

But how different it was now with Camilla, he thought, on this hundredth day of their new "reign of love".

And, talking of rain, the steady downpour began to slacken and a ray of watery sunshine illumined the pastoral scene.

As Camilla stepped forward to try her skill at the "Whack The Rat" stall, one of the photographers leaned forward to confide in her.

"You needn't worry, Camilla. You've totally replaced her, you know. For us and for the whole country. We don't even think about her any more, because you've just taken over her role completely."

Camilla's heart began to pound as she grasped the mallet with which she would be expected to strike the hand-knitted rodent as it descended from its plastic drainpipe.

Was this the moment she had waited for all these years?

Was this the final triumph over her glamorous rival which she had feared would never come?

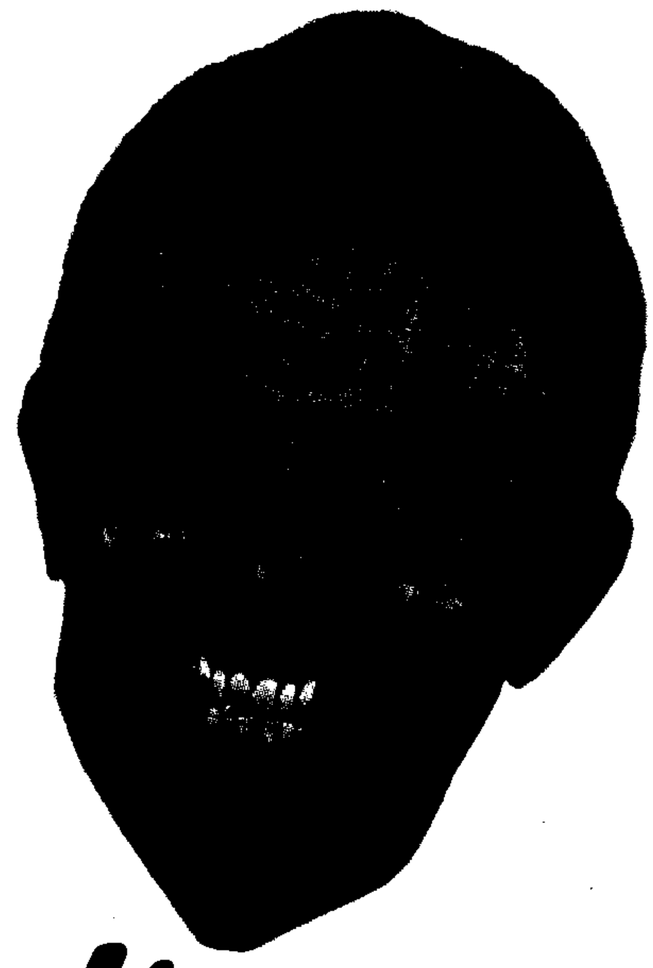
"Who needs the Queen Mum now we've got you?" laughed the photographer as he fired off another flash in her face.

The rat fell unimpeded into the mud, and the Norfolk rain began to descend in earnest.

(To be continued)

© Sylvie Krin, the Thanet Airport Experience Collection 2005.

Advertisement



Make-Up

The Tony Blair Way!!!

Do you look haggard, worried, shifty, guilty, washed-up?

You don't have to – thanks to Tony's exciting new *Make-Up* formula!

It's guaranteed to put a smile on your face and add years to your premiership!

1 **Here's how it works. Someone asks you a really difficult question. Such as, "Are there any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq?" So you just apply a little *Make-Up*. "Yes," you say, "there are hundreds of them, all over the place." See how easy it is?**

2 **Ok, let's try again! You're in a TV studio and some silly woman asks "Are NHS hospitals really getting better?" Apply a little more *Make-Up* and, hey presto, you fire back "Of course, you silly woman! The figures show that Britain's hospitals are now 2000 percent better than they were in 1997 under the Tories!"**

***Make-Up* shuts her up every time!**

3 **Still not convinced? Well, here's the clincher! Your boring Scots neighbour keeps asking you "When are you going to retire so that I can have your job?"**

On with the old *Make-Up* and you quickly reply "I am going any minute, Gordy. The job's as good as yours!" And off he goes, as happy as a lark.

Try some today. Only £2,000 a sachet

Save your skin with Tony's Make-Up!!

DIARY

MAX HASTINGS

I won a goldfish in a plastic bag at a fair last week. Between sobs, we flushed it down the lavatory, or what John Major used to call 'toilet'.

"Far better to be flushed down the lavatory than to be a burden on yourself and others," I observed to my wife as we saw his little orange tail disappear down the bend. That seemed to me the nicest thing one could say about the life of a goldfish, and often applies to people as well.

Shops have abandoned salesmanship. I visited several recently, looking for a halfway-decent blowpipe and poison darts with which to *despatch* an immensely irritating cat that has taken it upon itself to prowl around in our grounds.

The man – if you could call him that – in WH Smith looked completely blank.

"We mainly do magazines, books and stationery, sir," he whined. Excuses to that effect also came from the assistants in Woolworth, Rumbelows and Hallmark Cards.

Eventually, I took pot luck at Dixons, where the female assistant told me offhandedly that they just sold electrical goods. "Right!" I said, slapping £50 on the glass-top counter, which turned out to be far too frail for the job. "I'll have an electric chair. And make it small enough for a cat."

The brighter among you can guess what happened next. Yes: Dixons sell toasters and record-players and electric toothbrushes and heaven-knows-what-else. But they do not sell electric chairs for cats.

I returned home cursing the inadequacies of the British High Street. When you see how many cats there are – sometimes even inside people's houses, dammit! – you are left staggered by the retail industry's failure to plug this particular gap in the market.

The cat's infernal miaowing continues to grate on the nerves. I would normally despatch it with my 4.10, but my wife tells me it's illegal. I should have known. Soon this despotic Blair government will have killed off everything that's worthwhile about the English countryside. Believe me, it won't stop here. First, they make it illegal to pepper a cat to an early grave. Next, they'll force you to "apply for a certificate" if you want to despatch your old grandmother to a gentler place, even if she's proving the most profound irritation to herself and others.

It's high time we saw the positive side of suicide bombers. It wouldn't be my idea of a bunfight to pack my knapsack full of explosives, hold my nose and give a sharp tug on the red cord, but then frankly I'm not of the dusky Asian persuasion, no offence intended.

But, as the old saying goes, what's sauce for the goose isn't sauce for the gander, though in my experience apple sauce works well for both. Rather than flapping their spassy arms around at the first sign of suicide bombers and yelling for Mummy, the spineless Blair administration should get a grip and channel their undoubted enthusiasm to more constructive ends.

Getting rid of cats, for instance. If a fellow really wants to blow himself up, then jolly well let him do it while clutching a cat or two.

And let's not stop there. Leafing through the pages of *The Lady*, I notice to my horror that there are few if any small ads for suicide bombers. Yet who better for a ghillie?

Fishing in the Highlands can be a tiresome business, hanging around all day on the off-chance a salmon might deign to take a nibble of your hook. Far more efficient to have your ghillie pack himself neck-high with explosives and throw himself into the loch, willy-nilly.

And with any luck, the assorted fish might pop into the air ready cooked, leaving one's womenfolk with more time to retreat to their dressing rooms, bring out the old paintbrushes and make themselves look halfway presentable.

Mentioning women makes me think of handbags. Why do our womenfolk insist upon handbags? I've managed to get through well over half a century without the need for one, so why on earth couldn't they?

One of the many joys of leading our boys to victory in The Falklands was that none of them carried a handbag onto the battlefield. Just imagine the kerfuffle if they'd all wanted to rootle around in the handbags and powder their noses at the same time.

Don't get me wrong. I have the heartiest respect for the skills and talents of women. Colourful characters, they brighten our lives with their incessant chatter. And some of them are hugely capable. The best secretary I ever had was a woman, and the best cleaner too. I recently taught my wife to skin a rabbit and she took to it like a duck to water.

Nevertheless, it would be quite wrong to let them loose on the battlefield. When the order to charge was given, they'd never be ready, wanting at least another fifteen minutes to complete their gossip and continue to make arrangements for coffee-mornings, whist-drives and suchlike.

With French wine soaring beyond the prohibitive £2.50 mark, I boast to friends of having found a very reasonable substitute for red wine. Water and tomato ketchup, in roughly equal proportions, with a squeeze of purple paint for colouring, makes for a more-than-acceptable alternative. Likewise champagne. Mix your own urine with a splash of soda and your house-guests honestly can't tell the difference.

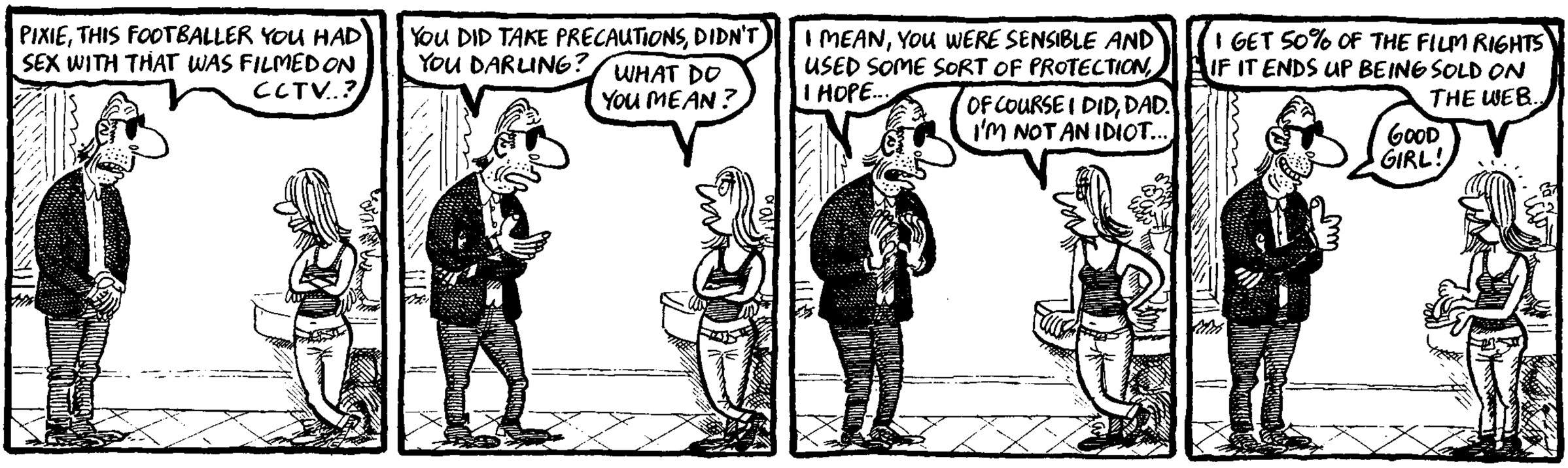
Serving spoons have long been considered vulgar in the grander houses.

Improvisation is the order of the day. Faced with a large bowl of strawberry blancmange, our host at a dinner-party in our part of the country overcame the problem by taking out his private parts, dipping them deep into the bowl, and proceeding from there. A reasonably-sized penis makes a perfectly workable serving-implement, as well as the perfect ice-breaker for when things get stuffy. And when autumn gives way to winter, one can double it up as a fire-poke.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

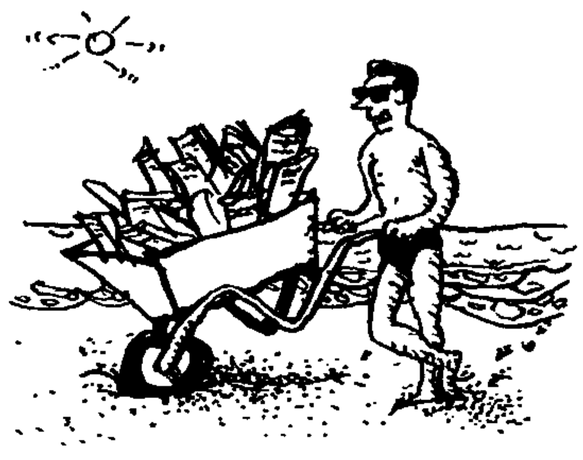
LIGGER


PIXIE, THIS FOOTBALLER YOU HAD SEX WITH THAT WAS FILMED ON CCTV..?
YOU DID TAKE PRECAUTIONS, DIDN'T YOU DARLING?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
I MEAN, YOU WERE SENSIBLE AND USED SOME SORT OF PROTECTION, I HOPE...
OF COURSE I DID, DAD. I'M NOT AN IDIOT...
I GET 50% OF THE FILM RIGHTS IF IT ENDS UP BEING SOLD ON THE WEB..
GOOD GIRL!

Literary Review

SUMMER READING

Our panel of celebrity critics reveal what they'll be packing for the beach.



A.S. Byatt

I was much pleased by Hugh Malachi Hee's *Subliminal Tales* (Snark Press, £9.99). These sharp, intrusive, shards of prose, bone-dry and yet strangely viscid, seemed to me to go beyond morality into a place where morality is not.

Rose Tremain

I was aghast and appalled to discover that, owing to some conspiracy or cabal of the London book world, my friend Caroline Moorehead has published no book this year, thus preventing me from recommending it.

D.J. Taylor

Amid the usual pile of crap, I was mildly diverted by the late Sid Prole's masterpiece of 1960s Tyneside life *Ha'wey to the Scotswood Road, Bonny Lad* (Coalscuttle Press, £10), which seemed to me in a very real sense to reinvent the whole idea of the post-war working-class novel in a manner hitherto approached only by his earlier epic *Didst Tha Niver Taste Stotty Cake?*, now inexplicably out of print.

Andrew Motion

A book was e'er a precious thing
Both bounteous balm and
time's great healer
Alas that all those which came
this year
Went to the remainder dealer

[Will this do? A.M.]

James Wood

Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (Cape) is that rarest of entities, a novel of well-nigh rapt interiority yet burnished throughout with the phantasmagoric sheen of the public world. It is a rigorous book and a vigorous book, a lyrical miracle of roseate prose. Aside from this treasure, Professor Silas Ventricle's *Hermeutics of the Soul* (University of Neasden Press) was punctiliously unequivocal in its dissection of Heidegger's essentially neo-Kierkegaardian moral project.

Jeremy Clarkson

Me, I'll be taking a gander at *Abi Titmuss's A-Z of Well Fit Birds*. I tried to read Barry Nutter's excellent *The Myth of Global Warming* (Barking Books, £1.99) in my deck-chair the other week, only the sun was too bleeding hot.

Richard Dawkins

Jesus the first H Bomb by Ezekiel Spart (Fang Press, £29.95) is a genuinely frightening book. Showing in unremitting detail how every church-goer and mosque-infester is merely a terrorist stooge, avid to foist his ludicrous opinions on right-thinking liberals at the point of a Kalashnikov, and providing convincing evidence that His Holiness the late John Paul II was in fact an international arms dealer, it demonstrates beyond all doubt that we should string these God-botherers up forthwith as it's the only language they understand. Read Spart and throw up (*shouldn't that be 'wake up'? – Ed.)*

Andrew Roberts

I was entranced by the little-known episodes in Conservative Party history so beguilingly vouchsafed by Quentin Tuft's *D'Ulle: Lost Tory Leader* (Crabtree & Toffe, £50), a sparklingly written life of Eden's right-hand man, the Right Hon. Reginald D'Ulle, minister of military procurement from September to October 1956. Fascinating above all is a conversation which Tuft – no doubt benefiting from his own membership of that august institution – suggests may have taken place in White's Club on 17 November 1955, when Viscount Rusk, the Tory Chief Whip, sensationally offered D'Ulle the post of assistant Colonial Secretary. D'Ulle's measured reply – that he 'didn't think Elsie [his wife] would fancy it much' – could usefully be born in mind by the crowd of upstart pretenders now clamouring for the Tory throne… [*continues*]

Professor John Carey

In the knowledge that most people will be recommending highbrow literary novels that are by their very nature offensive to ordinary folk, I should like to mention Monty Fishwick's *Amy Turtle: TV Titan* (Tender & Mainprice, £5.99) a heart-warming study of the vital role played by the factotum of the Crossroads Motel in British popular culture and at times capable of plumbing near-Tolstoyan depths of pathos.

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS

Party in the Blitz Elias Canetti

T.S. ELIOT: *Ach!* Why is it that even today I cannot form the letters of Eliot's name without wanting to spit? That he worked in a bank? The coarse, animalistic vulgarity of his face? That, when introduced to me at some banal social event, he pretended not to have read my book? Or was it that revolting modesty of manner beneath which, as I know to my cost, so much English arrogance lurks? Really, this is a subject of no interest to me [*continues for several pages*]

IRIS MURDOCH: My antipathy to Iris Murdoch is such that I must – not that she is of the slightest interest to me – say something about her. That repulsive, bear-like walk. Those meagre provisions, purchased at some wretched little shop in Oxford, with which she sought to stimulate my appetite! The poem she wrote me – allegedly a love poem – in which – I say this not in any spirit of vanity – I could find not one mention of my name! I suppose I must congratulate myself on my tolerance in forcing myself to seduce her, but what was it that she took from me? I am sure that she was grateful for my dislike of her, my constant rebukes, my patronising attitude to her intellect, yes, that was exactly what she needed.

MISERY AT PARTIES: Nowhere did I feel so miserable and alone than at parties. What on earth did these cold English men and women think they were doing in inviting such an important continental exile as myself to undergo the wretchedness of forced conversations initiated by interlocutors who had clearly never read my book? Fortunately I have always been the most patient of listeners.

ON HIMSELF: My strongest quality, which I believe that I have never compromised, is my insistence on myself. It may be a sort of virtue, and so it appears to me when I look at Iris's wretched philosophical book. Naturally I shall never seriously read it, for neither she nor it are of any interest to me. However… [*continues for even more pages*]

BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ADVERTISING campaign of the year so far goes to Headline publishing for its launch of James Patterson and Maxine Paetro's new novel, *4th of July*.

In May, posters began appearing with the headline "Cop Killer or Killer Cop?" above a huge picture of two handguns pointing at each other. One of the billboards was at the junction of Queen's Road and Oldham Road in the Manchester suburb of Miles Platting. Unfortunately, on the other side of the road was the memorial to PC Raja Basharat Ahmed, killed on duty in 1999 when a career criminal in a stolen car rammed his motorbike in front of a lorry.

Having insulted a large portion of the local community by reminding them of this particular Cop Killer, Headline achieved a memorable double last week at Stockwell underground station. The same poster with the same headline and handguns was on display where police shot Jean Charles de Menezes seven times in the head. The poster remained up for nearly a week after the death of the innocent Brazilian, this time as a rather tasteless reminder of a Killer Cop.

'Bookworm'

LIBRARY NEWS

■ "MORE money is to be spent on the UK's public libraries to make them a source of local pride," announced culture minister David Lammy last month, responding to a select committee report on book borrowing and other library services.

How much more money exactly? Er, £4m, according to the Downing Street press release. Spread across the UK's 4,300 public libraries, that's £930 each.

Given that last year's Libri report calculated that it costs £20 to get a £10 book on to the shelf of a public library (after processing it into the catalogues and so on), that's just £465-worth of new books.

This generous investment follows last year's announcement from Tessa Jowell of £2m to help "less successful" library services (*Eye* 1110). So is that all the nation's libraries need? Well, no. The select committee report concluded that "between £240m and £650m" worth of refurbishment is needed to the buildings alone – let alone the cost of improving what's available inside.

■ PROMPT action by Skidrow-on-Sea council has stamped out a worrying outbreak of antisocial behaviour in the square outside Brighton's new Jubilee library.

But Skidrow's press supremo Alan Stone is being tight-lipped. "All I'm going to say on the whole thing is we'd had complaints about someone hassling customers in the square," he tells the *Eye*. "Staff are also heartily sick of all this and fed up with what they regard as a campaign of harassment. The fact the square is strictly speaking private property enabled us to move him on – and we've certainly had no complaints about that."

The "someone" was in fact a mild-mannered literary journalist called Christopher Hawtree who, when not penning obits for the *Grauniad* or book reviews for the *Independent*, campaigns against the decline in standards in Britain's libraries – in particular those in Brighton and Hove.

Hawtree and another member of a sinister group called The Friends of Hove Library, were quietly collecting signatures for a petition which calls upon B&H council to restore separate biography and crime fiction sections at the Jubilee where, since it opened in March, all fiction has been lumped together alphabetically.

After gathering several hundred signatures from readers, sorry, "customers", the Friends were approached by one Pauline Scott-Garrett, Skidrow council's "assistant director, heritage" (library boss) and two other people, and told to "move on".

Pseuds Corner

Cricket's enduring grip has something to do with the way it encapsulates mortality: every wicket is a little death. And its most celebrated trophy is called the Ashes, which happens to be what many of us will end up as. Its connotations of heat, and fire, and phoenixes rising, all deepen its appeal.

TIM DE LISLE
The Times

If butterflies are life's lyrics, then moths are its elegies. They are not simply vital to the food chain, they are essential in the land of the imagination. How many thinkers have sat up late and alone in the pool of the lamp, watched them materialising secretly from the interstices of night, and considered how all the great things that we dream of are like moths against window panes trying to reach for the light.

RACHEL CAMPBELL JOHNSTON celebrates National Moth Night, *The Times*

I had spent my life exporting entropy to the borders of my universe and projecting it into space. And entropy was now returning, in the form of life that I had shaped, to spell out before my flabbergasted eyes its proof of the Second Law of Thermodynamics.

ROGER SCRUTON recalls the birth of his son Sam, *The Times*

I found that particular pieces of music helped me understand the past in a far more profound way than I had ever been able to before. I had long thought that australopithecines had slept on the ground. But listening to Bach's Prelude in C Major, I could more easily picture them waking in tree-top nests in the east African dawn 3 million years ago.

STEVEN MITHEN
New Scientist

Pseuds Corporate

As part of the PSPP project there is a small budget for "Interpretation" of each village's character and history...The National Park defines "Interpretation" as a communication process designed to reveal meanings and relationships of our cultural and natural heritage to the public, through first-hand involvement with an object, artefact, landscape or site.

Interpretation helps people to understand and appreciate the heritage that surrounds them, and to find their own meaning in it.
Good interpretation reflects the special qualities of the National Park and can be tailored in a sustainable way to individual sites. It can also engage a variety of audiences and can provide visitors with access to learning experiences on 365 days of the year. I will be writing to all residents under separate cover regarding possible "Interpretation" in their village.

GILLIAN STORY, Assistant Building Conservation Officer, Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, advertises the 'Private Spaces, Public Places' Village Heritage Project to local householders

CONTRIBUTORS: Tom Chivers, 'Snoot', Toby Matthews, Ross Smail, Mrs Dulcie Lewis.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

PFI NEWS

Completely mental

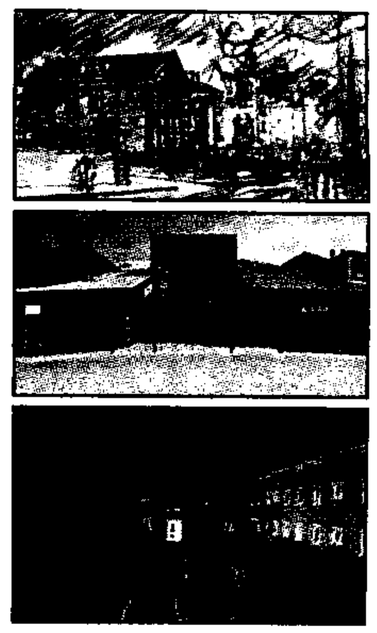
THE £47m private finance initiative scheme to build new mental health units in Leeds won a clutch of awards, including "best operational health project" at the 2003 National PFI Awards and Best Social Scheme from the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors. But the three main buildings don't actually meet the safety standards required for patients.

The Mount, Becklin and Newsam centres (pictured) replaced the huge High Royds Hospital and were built by Accent Partnerships (formerly Bradford & Northern Housing Association) for the Leeds Mental Health NHS Teaching Trust, opening in 2002 and 2003.

Given the potential risk of patients deliberately setting things on fire and the fact that some patients are sectioned under the mental health act and thus locked up, fire safety rules in mental health hospitals are stricter than in normal hospitals.

Confidential fire safety reviews commissioned by the NHS Estates agency last year, and seen by the *Eye*, found problems with "documentation, design, construction, operation and management" at all three sites. "Numerous instances of a poor design being further compromised by poor construction have been identified," noted the report on the Newsam Centre.

The review found everything from ill-fitting fire doors to mattresses with insufficient fire resistance, not to mention poor escape routes and a layout which makes it hard for staff to monitor their patients.



The trust has previously insisted that all the units "were built in compliance with building regulations as specified by Leeds city council" – but which building regulations? The *Eye* has also seen a copy of a 1999 letter from Bradford & Northern to Leeds council building control officers, classing The Mount as a "patient hotel" – a completely different kind of building to an in-patient mental health hospital, with a completely different fire code.

The trust told the *Eye*: "In 1999 all parties involved, including NHS Estates, debated whether our acute units should be constructed to an Acute General Hospital Standard for fire safety (HTM81) or whether the units required a less stringent standard (FPN7). HTM81, which was the standard for acute hospitals, and FPN7, which relates to 'patient hospitals', were reviewed with the result that our units contain features of both standards which could be best described as 'FPN7plus'."

In other words, er, they made up their own fire standards.

A trust spokesman said they had now carried out an additional survey of the work needed to comply with the report. "A considerable amount of remedial work has already been finished and we will complete all the outstanding work by October 06," he said. He added that Accent had accepted responsibility for the problems and "have provided resources to make delivery of a considerable number of the report's recommendations possible." So that's all right then.

Wheelie useless

RED FACES at the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) (pictured), where a £230m PFI computerisation project, due to be completed in 2002, is still not running – and the final date has just slipped again.

VOSA has a 10-year contract with Siemens Business Services to computerise the MOT system, installing the necessary systems at more than 19,000 garages around the UK. After numerous testing glitches pushed back the start date, the system went "live" in April and Siemens started taking new equipment out to garages.

Despite VOSA assuring the *Eye* in June that all would be finished "within the year", the department for transport has now admitted that roll-out is not expected to be complete until March 2006.

The Retail Motor Industry Federation (RMI) has already called for the project to be halted after a system crash in May brought more than 1,000 MOT testing businesses, which had completed installation, to a standstill for several hours.

"The government and VOSA must suspend any further testing on the computer system until guarantees can be given that the Siemens system will work robustly," said RMI head of technical operations Ian Davis-Knight. "Garages must not be allowed to lose revenue because of an inadequate computer system unable to cope with the demands placed upon it."

AIRPORTS

Snape snipe

WHEN the chairman of the consultative committee discussing the future of Coventry airport described anti-expansion protesters as "fundamentalists who will not be satisfied till they've turned the place into a bird sanctuary", it didn't seem a fair or impartial stance.

Lord Snape, the former trade unionist and MP, chairs the consultative forum supposedly facilitating "constructive dialogue between the airport, local residents, business and community organisations" over plans by multinational tour company TUI to expand the small airfield into a terminal offering cheap holiday flights to 2m passengers a year.

Not surprisingly, locals object to the noise and pollution such a development would bring. Planning permission for the scheme has been rejected by Warwick district council, but TUI has appealed and there is to be a public inquiry next year.

Lord Snape took up the post of chairman last May and made the comments about protesters to a BBC Radio 4 documentary team in April. Department for transport guidelines for airport consultative committees state clearly that "to maintain the confidence of the general public it is important that the chairman should not be closely identified with any sectional interest".

However, the House of Lords register of members' interests reveals that Lord Snape is now, er, an employee of TUI, acting as a "special adviser" to TUI Northern Europe since last December.

TAX AVOIDANCE

VAT will do nicely

IF YOU ever wondered why, when you pay by plastic at many of the large stores, 2.5 percent of the charge is described as being for "card handling" (even though the price is the same as for cash), the answer is that you are taking part in what the treasury describes as "one of the most blatantly abusive [tax] avoidance scams of recent years".

The idea is that the card-handling fee is exempt from VAT, enabling the companies running the scheme to earn extra millions to stash in various tax haven subsidiaries. Now, however, the court of appeal has decided that the dodge doesn't work, saving the exchequer an estimated £300m a year.

Who could have devised such a fiendish assault on the public finances? The court's judgment, considering a scheme set up by Debenhams five years ago, reveals the masterminds as none other than Ernst & Young.

The scheme has been exercising Customs officials for years since E&Y first sold it to Tesco (chief executive Terry Leahy, dinner guest of the PM at Chequers), giving the big retailers yet another advantage over smaller rivals. The treasury, meanwhile, has continued to take on the "abusive" firm's employees as tax advisers while – along with other Whitehall departments – paying the arch-tax dodgers tens of millions in consultancy fees.

Scandals such as the card handling scam are far from unusual. Since the introduction in August last year of a law requiring advisers to notify HM Revenue and Customs when they first sell a tax avoidance scheme, 524 income and company tax scams have been reported, each likely to have been sold to several taxpayers.

By far the most lucrative schemes for their users (and correspondingly expensive for all other taxpayers) are those described as "financial products", of which 343 have been reported, involving multinational corporations shifting millions between companies to exploit loopholes in increasingly complex tax law.

Of the 524 schemes devised in less than a year, the *Eye* has established that 252 were dreamt up by the "big 4" bean-counters KPMG, PwC, Deloitte and Ernst & Young; and 154 by other accountancy firms. A further 787 schemes have been used by taxpayers to dodge VAT quite legally and, although the architects of VAT scams don't have to be reported, they are widely known also to be mainly the big bean-counters.

The scale of their activity goes a long way to explaining the shortfall in tax collection estimated by cabinet secretary Gus O'Donnell when he was at the treasury last year as between £30bn and £40bn (or hundreds of new schools and hospitals) per year.

Having greatly helped HMRC find out how the wealthiest taxpayers dodge their liabilities, the new regime has been lauded, with some justification, as a great success. What the rules don't do, however, is stop the avoidance. To do that the Revenue faces the expensive and usually unsuccessful task of investigating and taking cases through the courts or blocking loopholes with legislation that is invariably one step behind the latest wheeze.

MPs like Newcastle's Jim Cousins and fellow old Labour stalwart Austin Mitchell have long campaigned against the multi-billion pound tax-dodging racket that is only now being more widely recognised. Mitchell recently put down an early-day motion calling for an investigation of the tax avoidance industry and launched a barrage of questions at the treasury asking for a serious clampdown. But his suggestions – including preventing tax avoidance advisers winning government contracts and introducing a general anti-avoidance rule to bring the whole pantomime to an end – have all fallen on the deaf ears of paymaster-general "Red" Dawn Primarolo, who was in charge of the Revenue for seven years before taking any serious action against tax avoidance in the shape of the new reporting rules.

The paymaster's touching faith in the tax advisory business was revealed when she recently explained to Mitchell that no adviser has ever been prosecuted as "...selling a tax avoidance scheme would not normally involve activity that amounts to a criminal offence".

She can't be contradicted because the big firms have never been investigated in Britain, unlike in the US where a senate inquiry two years ago found a "culture of deception" at one of this country's most active tax advisers, KPMG. A number of the firm's partners have since admitted to criminal activity in selling tax-dodging schemes by concealing evidence from the authorities, lying to clients about the effects of the scams and blocking investigations.

In the more gentlemanly world of British tax avoidance, fostered over years of business-friendly initiatives for multinational companies and their advisers (several currently on secondment at the heart of the treasury and other government departments), the chance of anything but the dimmest of lights being shone on their activities remains slim.

SCHOOL DINNERS

Turkey swizzlers

SCHOOL meals caterer Scolarest couldn't stop the bandwagon started by *Jamie's School Dinners*, so it is trying to jump onboard and steer it in the right direction with some less than subtle lobbying.

The "Turkey Twizzler" storm started by Jamie Oliver's (pictured below) Channel 4 show has had continuing repercussions for Scolarest. Schools in Merton, Camden and Islington have ended or are trying to end contracts with the caterer; and when Scolarest took over catering at University College London, staff and students protested wearing Turkey costumes.

Readers of the Labour-friendly *New Statesman* were probably puzzled therefore by a recent "food supplement" in the magazine which carried glowing references to *Jamie's School Dinners* but was sponsored by, er, Scolarest and its parent company, Compass Group.

The strategy of paying for articles in the *Staggers* was designed by Scolarest's new lobbying firm, Precise Public Affairs, headed by Robbie Macduff, a one-time assistant to Labour MP Allan Roberts.

Scolarest hopes that general pressure over school meals will result in an increase in the cash spent on catering, but will not mean an end to privatisation.

Schools who have found it easiest to improve their catering are those that still run their own kitchens. Not only do they have more control, but they do not have to divert any of the pitifully small amounts spent on kids' food into the profits (or massive executive salaries) of catering corporations. Three of the directors of Compass, the firm that owns Scolarest, earn more than £1m a year.

If Scolarest can rebrand itself as a concerned caterer rather than a cheap food dispenser, it will be able to grab a slice of the promised extra school meals spending. And it stands a good chance of success. Labour is still enthusiastic about multinationals making money from the public sector, after all: it was Tony Blair of course who knighted Francis McKay, the head of Compass.

RED FACE CORNER

THE probation wing of the national offender management service (Noms) is setting an exemplary example to its felonious clients.

Last month, much to the embarrassment of staff, bailiffs arrived at Wimbledon probation office because £31,000 in business rates had not been paid. Leaked memos from the local chief probation officer to head office described how bailiffs were threatening to take away the office furniture.

"This is completely unacceptable and highly embarrassing for the service," he wrote. The incident is being cited as another example of how privatization of the management and maintenance of the probation estate has failed the service – which, at more than £52m a year, is costing taxpayers an extra 35 percent.

REBUILDING IRAQ

Losing patience with the PMC's

ALL is not well among western security firms, including several British private military companies (PMCs), that are helping support the reconstruction of Iraq.

The high fees charged for this security adds hugely to rebuilding costs, and there are growing signs that the new Iraqi government is losing patience with some contractors, seeing their involvement as a waste of time and money which should have been spent on Iraq's own police and military security apparatus.

In April, the Iraqi government stopped paying two British outfits, Global Risks and Olive Security, for contracts originally signed by Iraq's coalition provisional authority (CPA). The British government at first backed the involvement of British PMCs, trumpeting Olive's role in particular. But the foreign office said it has not made representations to the Iraqi government to get the payments restarted.

The US government did try to step in, but in June Global took matters into its own hands and walked off the job, withdrawing Ghurkha and Fijian guards from Baghdad airport. The "strike" was widely reported – but not in Britain. As Global guards downed rifles, US troops were hurriedly sent in to replace them. Civil flights were stopped for a day, stranding passengers, including some Iraqi ministers. Global Risks would not return calls on the issue; and Olive Security said it "would not comment on contracts with clients". In a separate development, the British-South African security firm Erinys no longer has the contract to provide armed security for Iraq's oil pipelines.

Overall, while it looks increasingly as if the US-British policy of promoting private security firms in Iraq was misguided, the direction of some of the most essential security work is now being hidden behind claims of "commercial confidentiality".

ANTI-SOCIAL LEGISLATION

Curfew what a stinker

LAST YEAR the *Eye* highlighted the case of a law-abiding 14-year-old boy from Richmond in south-west London who was served with one of the government's new dispersal orders for browsing through the CD and DVD collections in two record shops.

He and his friend had noticed a uniformed man watching them from behind a pillar in WH Smith. They were then followed to an HMV store. As they left the latter, the uniformed figure announced himself as a community support officer, accused the pair of acting suspiciously and issued them with a leaflet including a ringed map of Richmond Green marked "Designated Dispersal Area".

It said: "Should you be required to leave this area by a Police Officer or a Community Support Officer, you must do so immediately. Failure to comply may render you liable to arrest, which could be punishable by three months' imprisonment and/or a fine up to £2,500."

The boys and their families were upset and angry at this oppressive and absurd over-reaction; and the *Eye* suggested this might be the sort of case that human rights lawyers at Liberty could use to challenge the controversial section 30 of last year's anti-social behaviour act. This gives police extraordinary powers to order "persons in a group" to disperse if they think any members of the public might be "intimidated, harassed, alarmed or distressed" and to impose a night-time curfew on anyone under 16 who is unaccompanied by an adult in a designated area after 9pm – even if they are doing nothing wrong.

Two weeks ago the teenager and Liberty won their case in the high court. Lord Justice Brooke ruled: "All of us have the right to walk the streets without interference from police constables or community support officers unless they possess common law or statutory powers to stop us." He said the new legislation did not give them such powers over law-abiding citizens. Nor did the new legislation compel children to reveal their home addresses.

Much to the government's embarrassment, the judge said it merely gave the police the "very welcome express power" to take teenagers home if they wanted to go home.

Home office ministers, more concerned with garnering headlines in the *Daily Mail* about tackling yob culture than worried about riding roughshod over the rights of the law-abiding young, are to appeal.

More ASBO-jumbo

MORE and more children with learning and communication difficulties, including autism, Asperger's and Tourette syndrome, are being issued inappropriately with anti-social behaviour orders.

This is not surprising given that in its haste to deal with "yob culture", the government forgot that children need greater protection while going through any court process.

Instead of appearing before justice panels for juveniles, as children and teenagers would if they had committed a crime, those receiving police or local authority ASBOs are coming before adult courts because ASBOs are regarded as civil matters. This means that children who may end up being criminalized for breach of an ASBO are not given the same rights as their "criminal brethren" – like social and mental health reports.

The results are disturbing. A 15-year-old autistic boy from Gloucester was served with an ASBO for constantly looking over a neighbour's fence; while a boy of 15 in the Midlands was given an ASBO to stop him swearing in public, even though he has Tourette syndrome and cannot stop himself.

Bibic, a group supporting families of children with brain injuries, has compiled a long list of children with learning difficulties who have been made subject to ASBOs. With the probation union Napo, it has recently met with the Magistrates' Association to try to ensure that such children are given proper representation in court so they are not wrongly criminalised.

PS: The government has also been wielding its legal sledgehammer to crack a nut in the case of Brian Haw, the anti-war protester who has been staging the 24-hour vigil outside parliament, surrounded by an ever growing collection of unsightly posters. He is arguing that the serious organised crime and police act, which makes it a criminal offence to demonstrate at parliament without police permission, is not retrospective. The legislation states that it becomes an offence "if, when the demonstration starts, authorisation has not been given under the act". Much to Tony Blair's annoyance, Haw's protest began four years ago, first against Iraqi sanctions, now against the war.

QINETIQ

DERA at the price

AS QINETIQ, the part-privatised defence evaluation and research agency (DERA), invites the big investment banks to bid for arranging its full flotation on the stock market, estimates of the value of the company are rocketing.

The shares are now expected to fetch £1.1bn, valuing the stake owned by US private equity group Carlyle at around £340m. Not a bad return for the well-connected outfit that bought 31 percent of the company, and with it management control, from the ministry of defence back in December 2002 for £42m while the government kept responsibility for the expensive environmental liabilities left behind.

Last weekend the *Sunday Telegraph* revealed that, in the kind of scam all too familiar to *Eye* readers who have followed the Mapeley fiasco, Carlyle's shares are held in the secretive tax haven of Guernsey.

The initial sell-off was heavily criticised at the time, notably by Tory defence spokesman Gerald Howarth, as yet another under-priced deal at the taxpayer's expense. Now the consequently massive gains to be made by Carlyle are justified on the grounds that the UK and US governments have significantly increased their defence spending in the last couple of years – er, clearly a development that could not have been foreseen at the end of 2002 with the war on terror getting into full swing.

When Carlyle acquired its stake around 13 percent of the shares were handed over to DERA staff, notably the directors. Among them were chief executive Sir John Chisolm and finance director Nick Love who, as reported in *Eye* 1063, had already made a packet out of an earlier management buy-out of part of DERA. He returned to the agency in 2001 to engineer the formation of QinetiQ and the sale of the controlling interest to Carlyle.

These and other directors, including chairman and former Whitehall mandarin Dame Pauline Neville-Jones, stand to make several million pounds, while there are no plans to recover the hundreds of millions of pounds by which the taxpayer has evidently been sold short.

PS: The man charged with looking after the taxpayer's interests in the flotation is the head of the government's shareholder executive, Richard Gillingwater, also a Qinetiq director and formerly of investment bank CSFB. The DTI has just revealed that he is ably assisted at the executive by four secondees from those well known guardians of the public interest, KPMG, Deloitte and PricewaterhouseCoopers.

ROYAL MAIL

Gardiner's question time

THERE seems to be some confusion in the government over the meaning of public ownership and privatisation when it comes to the post office.

The latest ministerial line is: "We will pursue our ambition of seeing a publicly owned Royal Mail fully restored to good health, providing customers with an excellent service and its staff with rewarding employment."

While this looks like a straightforward commitment to public ownership, trade secretary Alan Johnson insisted on parliament's last day of term that he hasn't ruled out private ownership by an employee trust. His underling Barry Gardiner went on to extol the virtues of cooperative ownership and, somewhat pre-empting the fate of Royal Mail, expressed the hope "that we can expand them in government".

The communication workers union, meanwhile, sees any form of private ownership as the thin end of the wedge and remains implacably opposed.

Inevitably the decision on Royal Mail's future can only be made after a "new" Labour favourite has been brought in to look at it. The man chosen is Sir George Bains, who did nothing to endear himself to public sector unions when he set a miserly minimum wage as the first chairman of the low pay commission before going on to side with the employers when brought in to resolve the firefighters' dispute of 2002. He currently earns a crust as a director of Short Brothers (an arms manufacturer) and Electra Private Equity Investment Trust.

The writing appears to be on the wall for full public ownership of the mail.

FOLLOW-UPS...

■ **BRITISH NUCLEAR FOOLS:** When BNFL bought American nuclear company Westinghouse for nearly £1bn in 1998, the *Eye* predicted that its American adventure would go badly wrong. Westinghouse is indeed now up for sale, as BNFL's rotten record seems finally to have persuaded the government to dismember the firm.

BNFL's board was kept onboard with the lure of financial success through a US-backed nuclear renaissance, its Westinghouse subsidiary building more atomic power stations. But the failure of Labour's plans to privatise BNFL meant the Westinghouse purchase became one of the government's largest nationalisations. Moreover, BNFL's ownership of the American firm dragged the board into scandals including the use of BNFL/Westinghouse money as donations to the US Republican party. Distracted by the Westinghouse dream, BNFL then failed to deal with the leaks and failures at the Thorp reprocessing facility here in Britain, effectively killing the company's future.

In the City

COMPANIES using private investigators to grill employees suspected of misconduct will in future need to show more concern for their interests and safety than was illustrated in the tragic case of Richard Chang.

The Abbey National business analyst fell to his death at the bank's London headquarters last year after being questioned for more than two hours about three anonymous letters making allegations of corruption in the awarding of IT contracts.

The Chang inquest two weeks ago resulted in a verdict of suicide by the jury. But the St Pancras coroner, Dr Andrew Reid, announced that he would send a report to ACAS, the Advisory Conciliation & Arbitration Service, recommending guidance for employers designed to prevent similar tragedies.

Dr Reid said there was a need for guidance in the conduct of similar investigative procedures when employers are dealing with sensitive matters involving employees so as to protect them, whether or not they were considered vulnerable.

"Harold has boardroom eyes"

The coroner was asked to make the report by Chang's widow, Lay Peng Lim – a move supported by Abbey. Lay Peng blamed Abbey and Kroll Associates, hired to discover the authors of the letters, one of which was sent to the Financial Services Authority (FSA), for her husband's death. She said he had been "deceived by Abbey into attending a meeting" with two Kroll investigators where he had been subjected to "consistently hectoring and misleading questioning".

The coroner's decision was clearly influenced by the evidence during the three-day inquest which showed that, but for a fatal failure of communication between the Kroll team and the Abbey personnel department, Chang would most probably not have been in a position to kill himself.

At the end of the interview Kroll was supposed to have contacted Abbey personnel executives who were expected to escort Chang from the meeting. Instead, the interview ended inconclusively at lunchtime when Chang requested a break. Abbey was not alerted in time and no Abbey personnel were waiting. Chang simply left unaccompanied and made his way to the fifth floor. Some 40 minutes after the interview ended Mr Chang was dead.

The line taken by the coroner over the need for rules governing such investigations also highlighted the potential conflict of interest between Abbey, Kroll and its two operatives: former senior Scotland Yard detective Howard Jones and then deputy head of business investigations, Peter Pender-Cudlip. While Abbey was keen to stress that procedures had been in place to escort Chang from the interview, the Kroll position seemed to be that these had not been followed by its team.

The relevance of this could be seen in the heavy legal presence at the inquest, including representatives from insurers acting perhaps for Kroll as well as Abbey in the eventuality of any future legal action by the Chang family. It is not clear whether such action will be taken or whether a settlement will be arranged. As Chang, 48 and with two young children, was due to start a new IT job at Royal Bank of Scotland at a much higher salary two weeks after his death and had no history suggesting a risk of suicide, any claim could be substantial.

The coroner suggested there were lessons to be learned from the tragedy. This was also admitted by Abbey. After an investigative interview the "employee should not be unescorted". "He should not be allowed to roam around the building". Employees could be "rendered vulnerable" by such an interview process.

This is often not grasped by those who carry out the interviews – especially those working for corporate investigators like Kroll. Chang was described by Jones as "calm" and "not emotional". However, his subsequent actions suggest this was not the true impact of being accused of involvement in producing the letters.

Jones described the linguistic, fingerprint and computer data evidence against Chang as "strong" but "circumstantial", "not conclusive but suggestive". It might not have convinced a court. But Chang, who made no admission and agreed to provide fingerprint samples, was not to know that. Interviews of that type are often all about bluff if there is no clear proof and no confession. Chang left a note admitting responsibility.

"This case is a tragedy, there is an issue of preventing similar fatalities," the coroner said. There was a need for a consistency in approach regarding the interviews of vulnerable employees. "Employers should have in mind the case of Mr Chang," said Dr Reid.

The conduct of the interview was disturbing for other reasons too. For Abbey because of the way in which Chang was invited to the meeting on a false pretext, met by his boss Mark Jackson and the head of human resources Richard Carr, who then exited the meeting leaving him with Jones and Pender-Cudlip. Nobody from Abbey remained present.

The surprising decision by the coroner not to call Pender-Cudlip or more Abbey executives angered the Chang family but was seen as part of restricting the inquest to what happened, not why. The coroner made clear that the jury was not allowed by law to consider questions of criminal or civil liability or wrongdoing by anyone.

Chang was also not given the right to be represented during his interview. Abbey in-house lawyer Robin Parkinson insisted this was because the meeting was "fact finding" not "disciplinary". However, it was clear that at the end of the "fact finding" it was highly likely that Chang, a prime suspect and the first to be interviewed, was almost certain to have been suspended.

Parkinson insisted no notice could be given because of Abbey's security concerns about possible sabotage of the IT systems for its retail banking. The presumed concern was that even if Chang or other suspects had been suspended then interviewed, they could have alerted other conspirators.

Chang worked in an IT unit at Abbey Financial Markets involved with implementation of the Basel II rules for capital requirements due to be enforced in 2007. Basel II is designed to improve risk management and strengthen the global financial system.

The anonymous letters sent to the FSA and senior Abbey management in May and June last year referred to certain of these IT contracts involving the City-based Buttonwood Tree consultancy group. The allegations related to favouritism between various individuals at Abbey and Buttonwood Tree.

Abbey carried out an internal investigation which found no truth in the allegations which Parkinson described as "mischief making and malicious". A "limited" investigation was carried out by Scotland Yard's fraud squad after pressure from the Chang family. This, said the coroner, also found "no evidence of corporate governance breaches". Details of the letters were not made public at the inquest.

For Kroll the interview technique was also a problem because of the fact that it was recorded without Chang's knowledge by Jones with a digital recorder in his briefcase. The recording was not played at the inquest. Jones said it was not necessary to tell Chang because the recording was only for his personal use. However, this could be open to serious debate on privacy and – like the lack of representation – human rights issues.

The jury was told by Det Insp Heather Carpenter, who headed what she described as a "very, very extensive investigation" into Chang's death, that in her view the interview of Chang was not "oppressive" or "intimidating".

But this view was sharply contradicted by Vincent Santeng, Chang's line manager and another suspect who was being interviewed by Jones and Pender-Cudlip when news came of Chang's death. He said he felt intimidated in particular by the "aggressive" way he was stared at while being interviewed.

Santeng accused Kroll of editing the recording

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG

MEGA BANK
WE'VE PAID OUT $650 BILLION LAST YEAR PROPPING THEM UP! WE CAN'T KEEP UP THAT LEVEL OF AID SPENDING...
...BUT THERE COULD BE A MASSIVE DISASTER. EVEN GREENSPAN SAYS SO!
WE'VE GOT TO KEEP FUNDING THE AMERICAN DEFICIT!!
NO SMOKING

Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

Michael Grade's horror show at Pinewood studios

Winners and losers from Pinewood's float last year...

+£1.4m	...outsider shareholders
...the Beeb chairman (who also chairs Pinewood)	-£21m

of his interview to omit certain of his statements. This was denied and said to be an attempt to explain contradictions between his original police statement and the transcript.

Santeng, who denied any knowledge of the letters, was subsequently suspended and then sacked by Abbey. He is now bringing an employment tribunal claim against the bank.

The Santeng case and any future action by the Chang family could throw further uncomfortable attention for Abbey and Kroll on the death of Richard Chang.

WHILE my Lord Ashcroft continues to look for deals to make his somewhat insensitively named AIM vehicle Bombshell go off, he is embroiled in an explosion of a different kind in his Caribbean fiefdom of Belize. There, the government is under siege from the US courts over its effective renationalisation of Belize Telecommunications – a company Ashcroft used to control and may yet do so again.

Ashcroft's Belize-based Carlisle Holdings group sold control of the former Central American colony's telecom monopoly back to the government in February 2004. Belize then cut a deal to sell that 52 percent to an American group, Innovative Communications, run by the colourful Jeffrey Prosser for $30m down and $59m later. But when Prosser failed to make a payment last February, Belize seized control.

Now the government, with whom Ashcroft is on good terms, wants to sell 37 percent of BT to a trust for its employees (20 percent), Carlisle (12.5 percent) and other Belizeans. That could give Carlisle, which had acquired more shares since the row began, more than 35 percent of the company. Its Belize Bank is also supposed to finance the shares purchased for the employees so would hold them as security. The deal has been attacked by the BT unions.

Undoubtedly this confusion will have come as an embarrassment rather than an opportunity for Ashcroft who, the Prosser camp privately alleges, has exploited the situation. Belize instead blames Prosser's own financial problems. He is being sued by his biggest lender for $550m and faces a $220m judgment awarded to former minority shareholders. Prosser claims Innovative did not pay because Belize had failed to make regulatory changes it had promised.

Prosser went to court in Miami and US federal judge Ursula Ungaro-Benages ordered Belize to reinstate the Innovative representatives to the BT board. When it failed to do so, the judge ordered Belize to pay a contempt fine of $50,000 a day from 29 March. Instead, Belize declared the judgment unenforceable. The contempt fine – possibly the first on a country – now tops $4m.

A six-day trial over Innovative's claim for restored ownership of its shares and $24m damages ended in June. The judge has yet to give her verdict. But any damages will be a blow for Belize which already has deep financial problems and could face its assets in the US being seized.

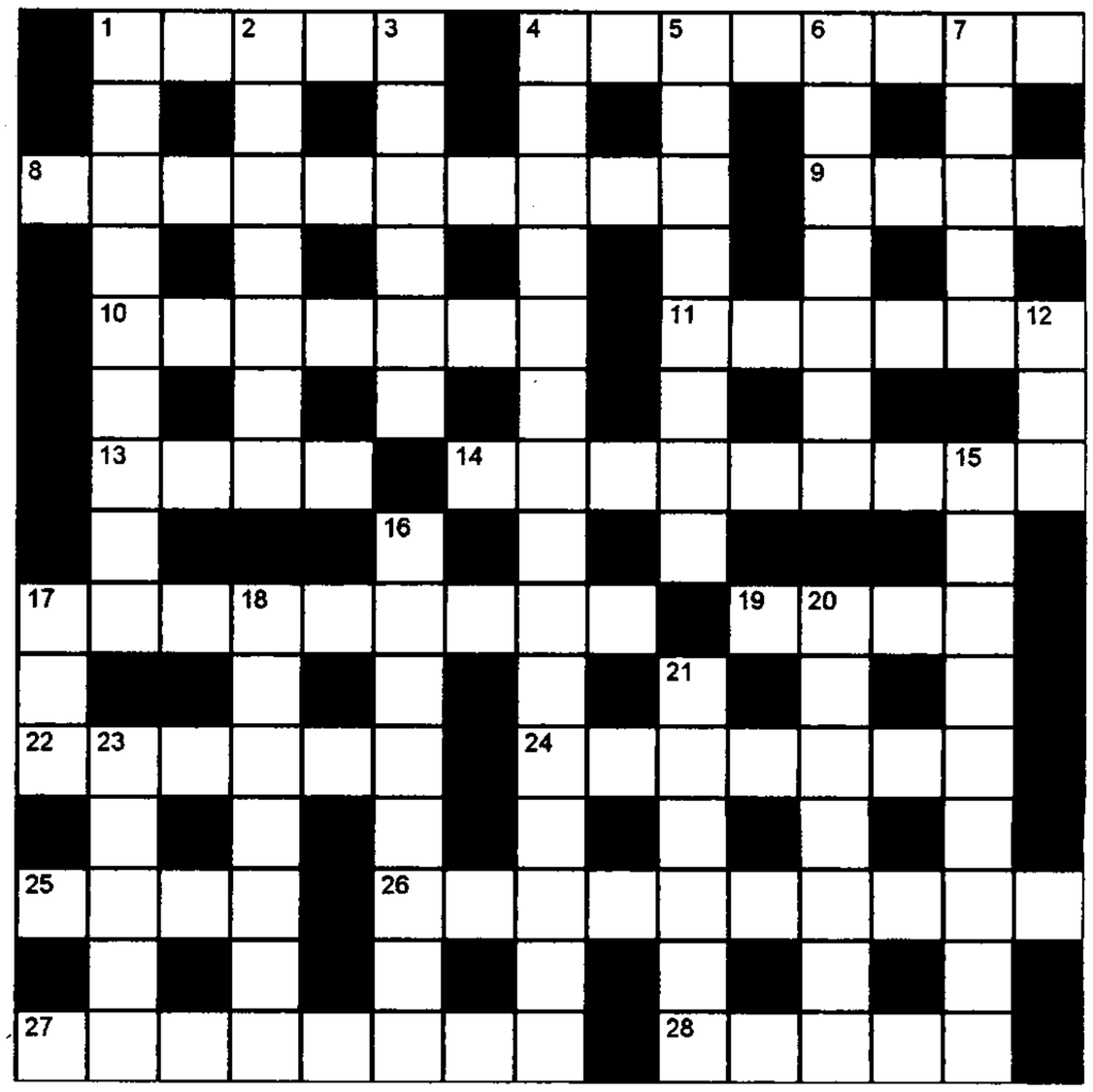
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 293

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 12 August 2005

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

1 Lean Jack Straw's number one dick-head (5)
4 Like m'lud Jack and Lucia screwed with Di in between (8)
8/6 Howard's "cool" Conservative? Try this to replace him (10,7)
9 Forte admirer's flipping crap (4)
10 Di, with a new top, and Charles's man arse over tip in Mediterranean port (3,4)
11 Humming the start of *Sally* with George (6)
13 Fags caught turning over soldier to a point (4)
14 Government advisors consider Brown king? (5-4)
17 Conservatives leader's member blue? Withdraw! (5,4)
19 As the man in the missionary position starts to ardently tug on pecker (4)
22 Pisspoor as a *Sun* "holiday paradise" (6)
24 "Gutless" Tony sought office before Brown's final year of abuse of power (7)
25 British sailors beset by personal problem in the Czech Republic (4)
26 It recently got a new religious head having a duty to one stuck in a shitty place (3,7)
27 Fanny's bit of pleasure: getting crooked solicitors expelled thus (8)
28 Hump or just a bit of a feeling? (5)

DOWN

1 Non-believers are getting plastic surgery outside the church (9)
2 Now more a danger signal to New Labour? (3,4)
3 To be successful, Rev. Tony's opening "Hi" needs a spin (6)
4 Lord's spectator you dread calling at your door? (8,7)
5 As Gordon dreams of doing to Blair, getting Deputy round to spill the beans? (8)
6 See 8ac.
7 Quite legit, ditching Left base (5)
12 End of Tory dominating the country – "It's disgusting!" (3)
15 Shag Penny, heartlessly taking no precaution – a minor irritation (5,4)
16 Insurance employee after loss of a day barely mounts Brenda (8)
17 Make a fool of Howard's dwindled lot? (3)
18 Exclude (non-Feminist) lesbian having gone public about her sexuality (4,3)
20 No. 10 is, shamefully, its cause for Tony and Gordon? (7)
21 It could go to one's head, sounding like the Beeb's director general (6)
23 Top-rated gents' - not popular to be picked up by the ears (5)

Crossword 292 winner: F. RILEY

ACROSS: 1 Bisect 4 Narcosis 9 Odd job man 11 Twang 12 Jam tart 13 Wealthy 14/16 Binge drinkers 18 Impaired 20 Bleep 22 Dress up 24 Oil well 26 Retro 27 Pussyfoot 28 Contempt 29 Upkeep.

DOWN: 1 Boob job 2 Sodom 3 Chorale 5 Agnew 6 Catwalk 7 Smart arse 8 Saggy 10 Matador 15 Number Ten 17 Indoors 19 Asshole 20 Belly up 21 Palmtop 22 Doric 23 Pop-up 25 Emote.

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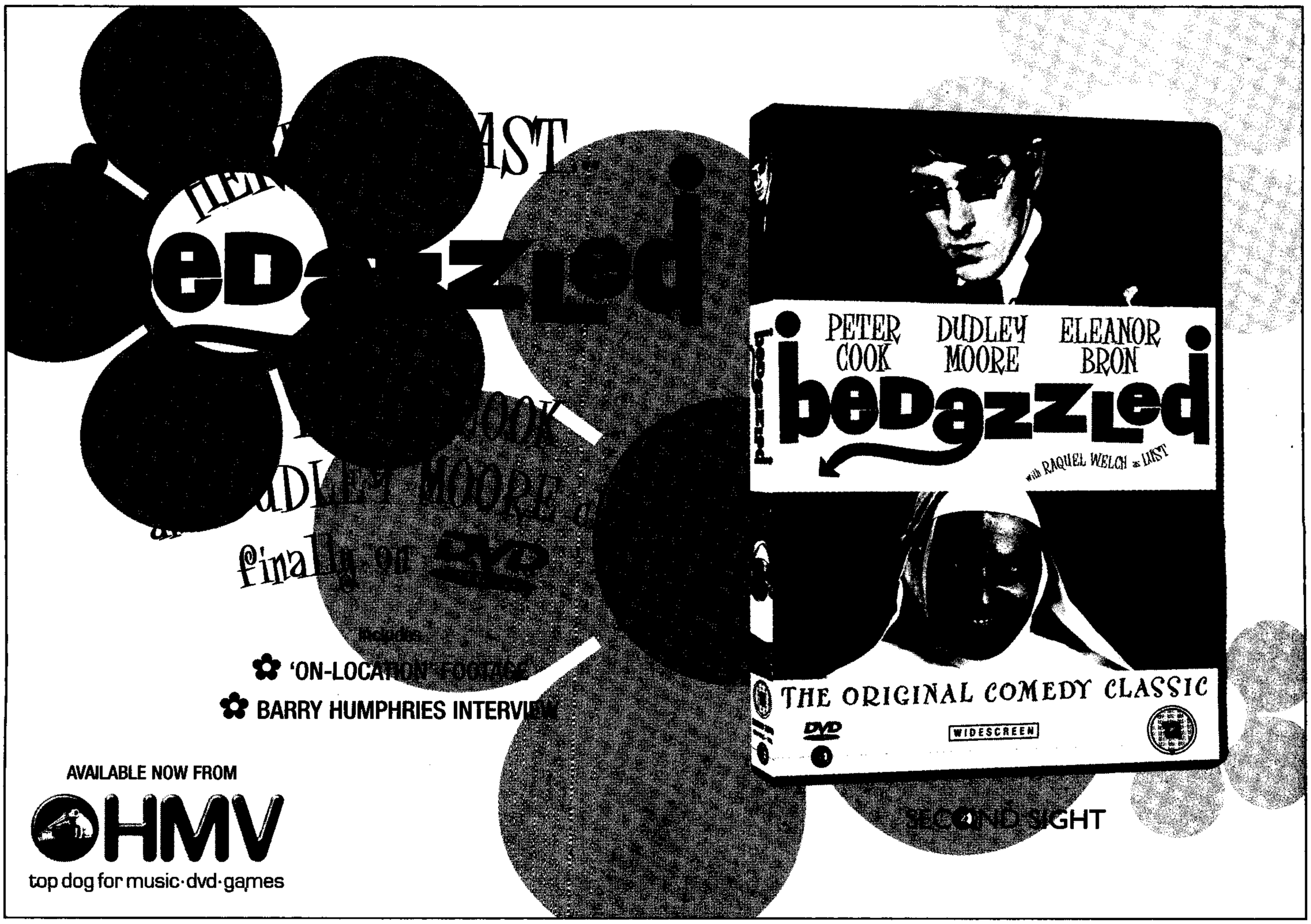

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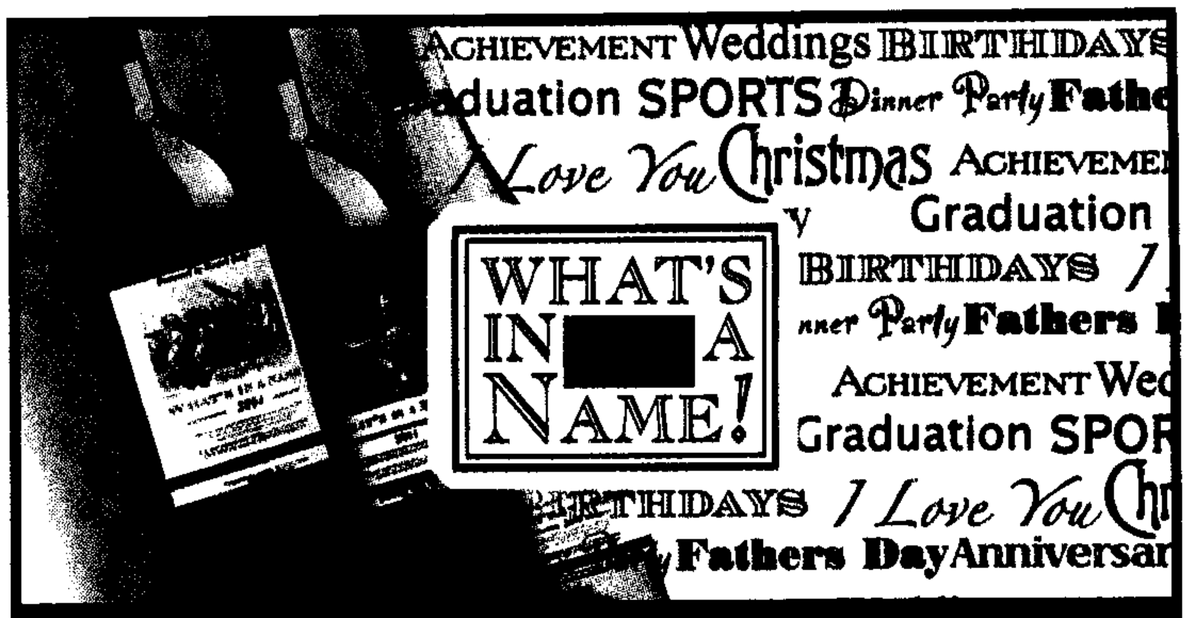

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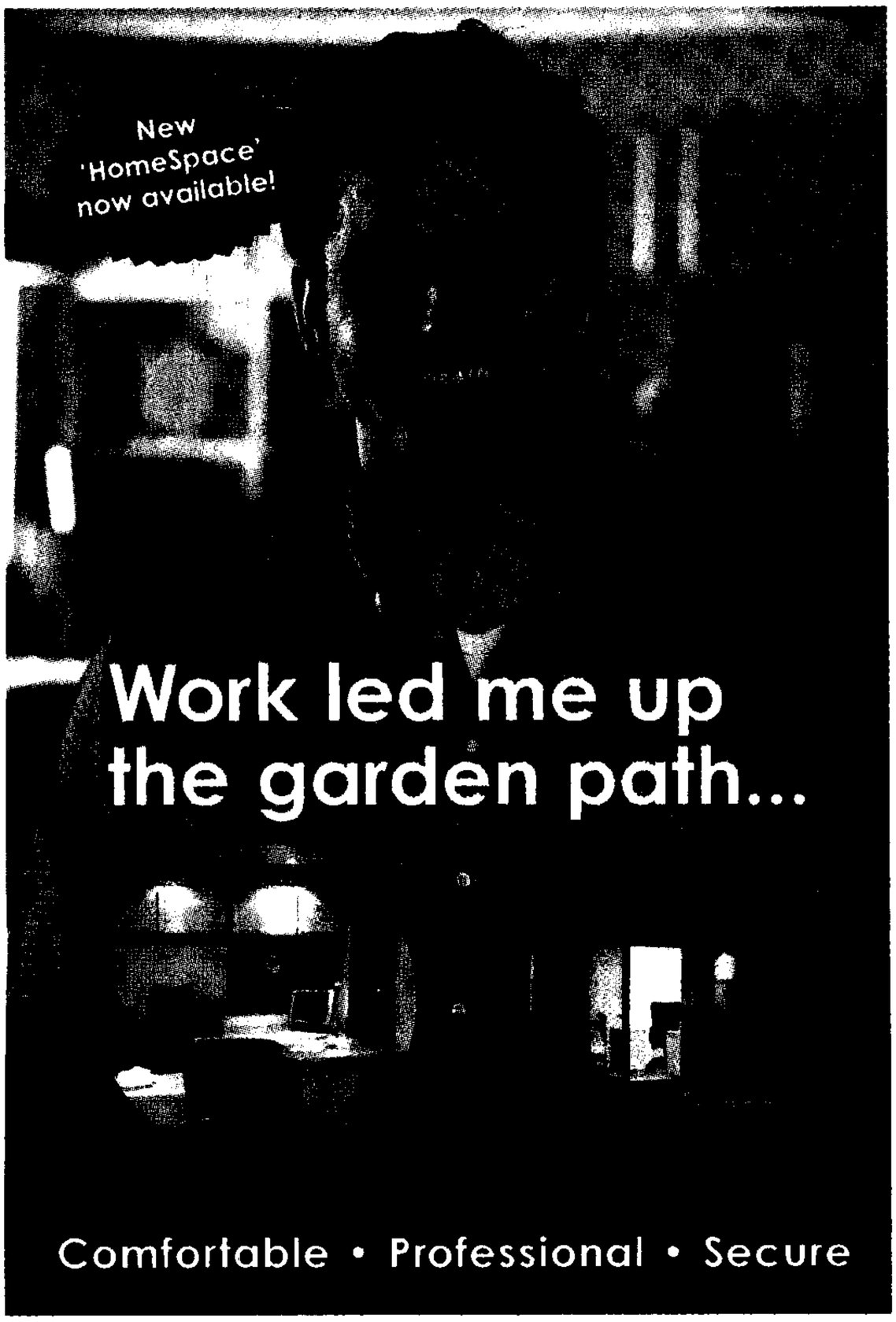

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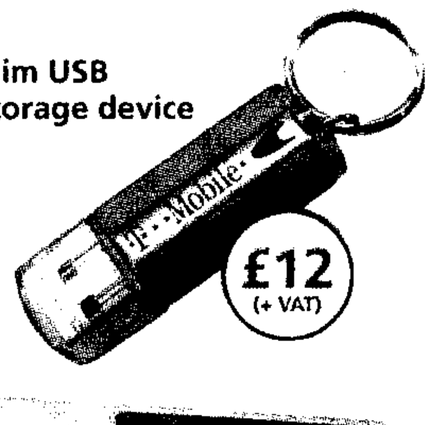

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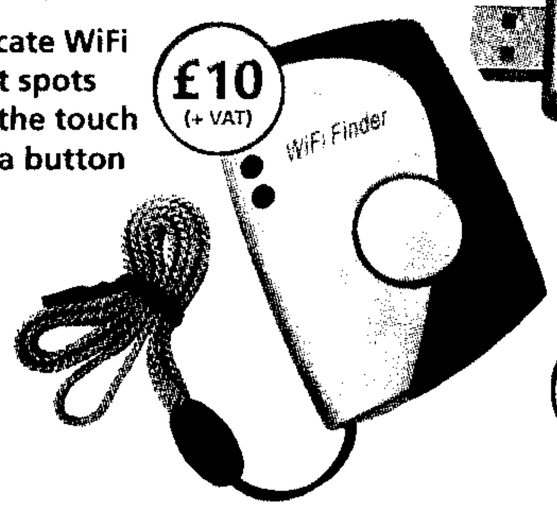

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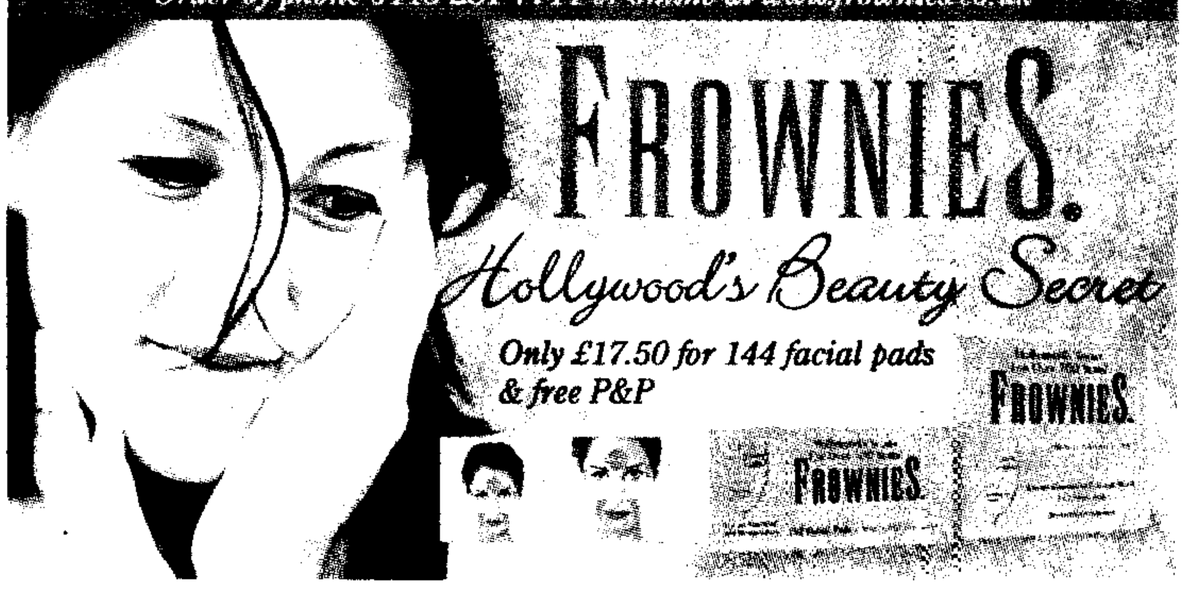

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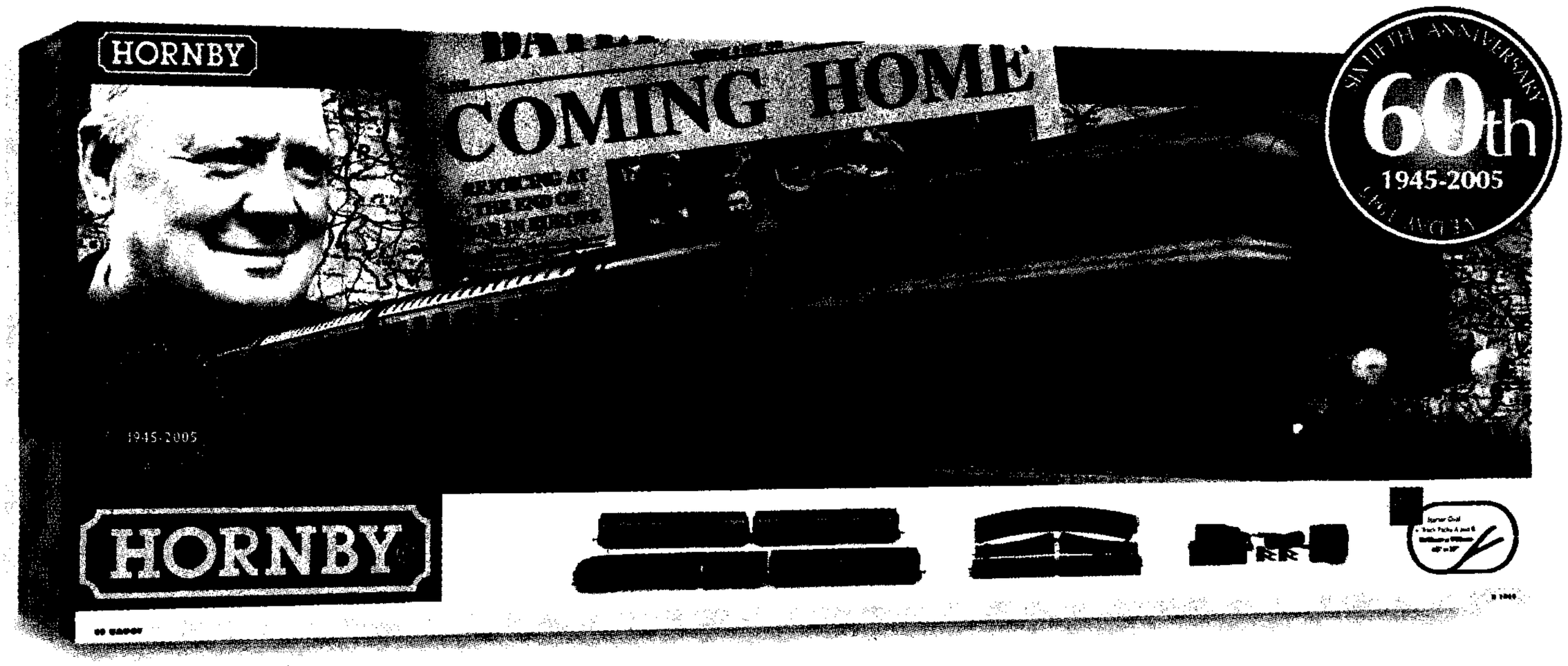

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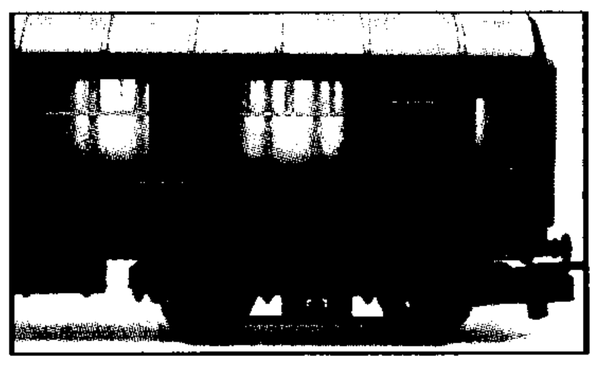
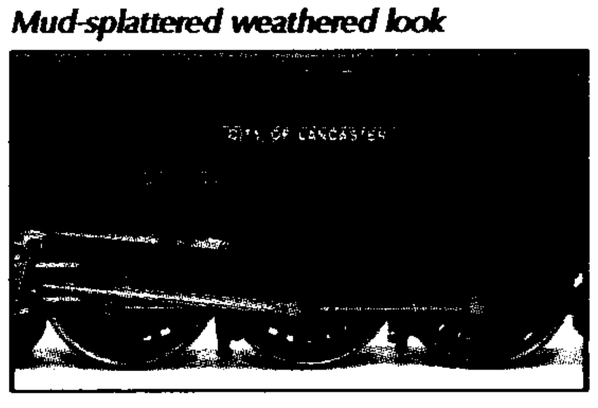


Mud-splattered weathered look



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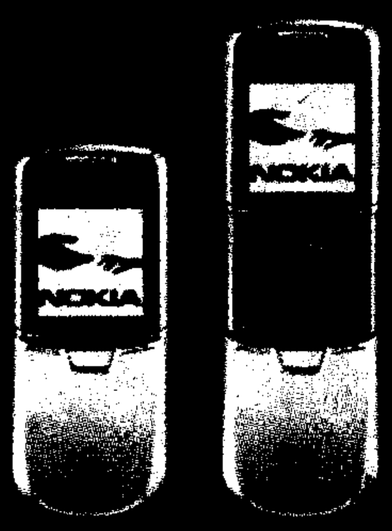

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